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THE NEW YORKER

FEB. 9 & 16, 2009

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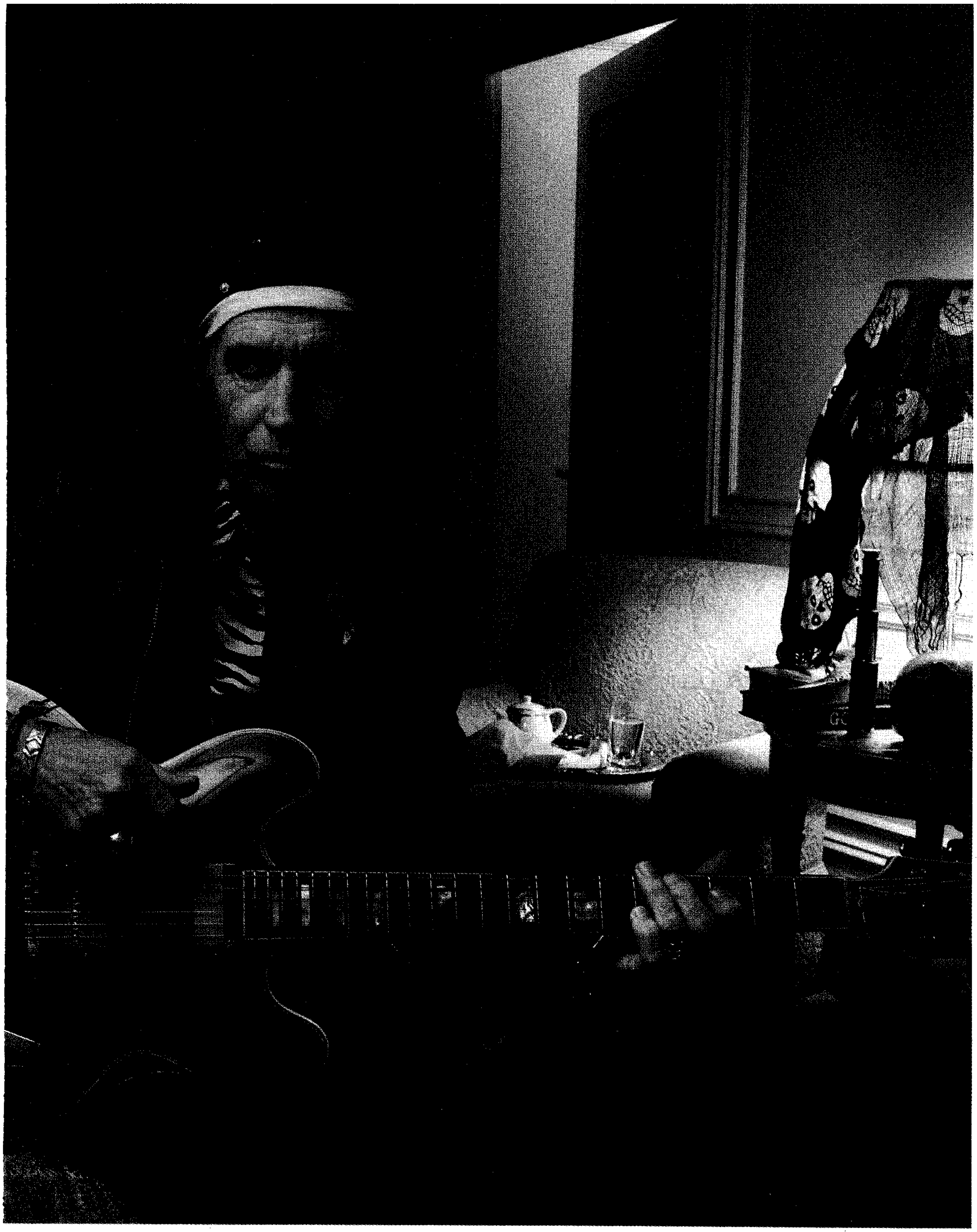

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THE NEW YORKER
THE ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

FEBRUARY 9 & 16, 2009

10 GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN
35 THE TALK OF THE TOWN
Adam Gopnik and Roger Angell on John Updike as colleague and inspiration; James Surowiecki on moral hazard.

Jerome Groopman 42 MEDICAL DISPATCH
That Buzzing Sound
What causes tinnitus?
Evan Osnos 50 LETTER FROM CHINA
The Promised Land
African merchants come to Guangzhou.
John McPhee 56 PERSONAL HISTORY
Checkpoints
Where accuracy meets flair.
John Updike 64 FROM OUR PAGES
Picked-Up Pieces
Selections from half a century of work.
George Packer 80 A REPORTER AT LARGE
The Ponzi State
Florida foreclosed.
Steven Millhauser 94 FICTION
"The Invasion from Outer Space"

THE CRITICS
Sasha Frere-Jones 98 POP MUSIC
Beyoncé approaches a crossroads.
BOOKS
Claudia Roth Pierpont 102 *James Baldwin's flight from America.*
109 Briefly Noted
John Lahr 110 THE THEATRE
"Hedda Gabler."
Joan Acocella 114 DANCING
Edward Villella and Miami City Ballet.
David Denby 117 THE CURRENT CINEMA
Paltry Oscar offerings.

Continued on page 4

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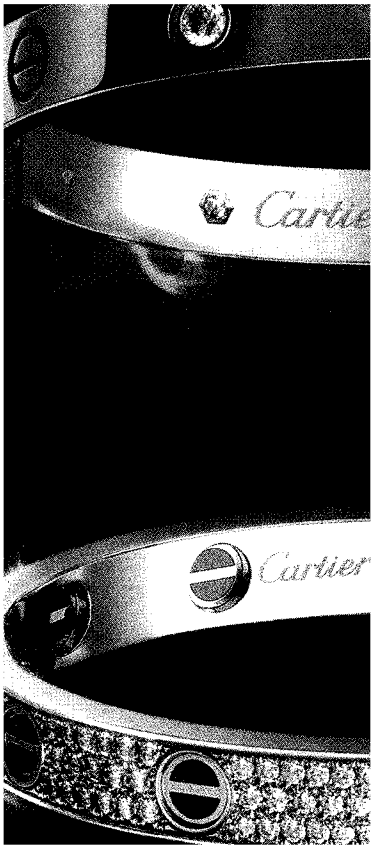

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Cartier

POEMS

Jane Hirshfield 55 "French Horn"
Seamus Heaney 88 "In the Attic"
Jessica Greenbaum 104 "The Two Yvonnes"

COVER

Rea Irvin "Eustace Tilley"

DRAWINGS *Roz Chast, Charles Barsotti, Paul Noth, Bruce Eric Kaplan, Matthew Diffee, Leo Cullum, Jack Ziegler, Barbara Smaller, Michael Crawford, Frank Cotham, P. C. Vey, Emily Flake, Danny Shanahan, Carolita Johnson, Drew Dernavich, Mick Stevens, Tom Cheney, William Haefeli, Matthew Martin*

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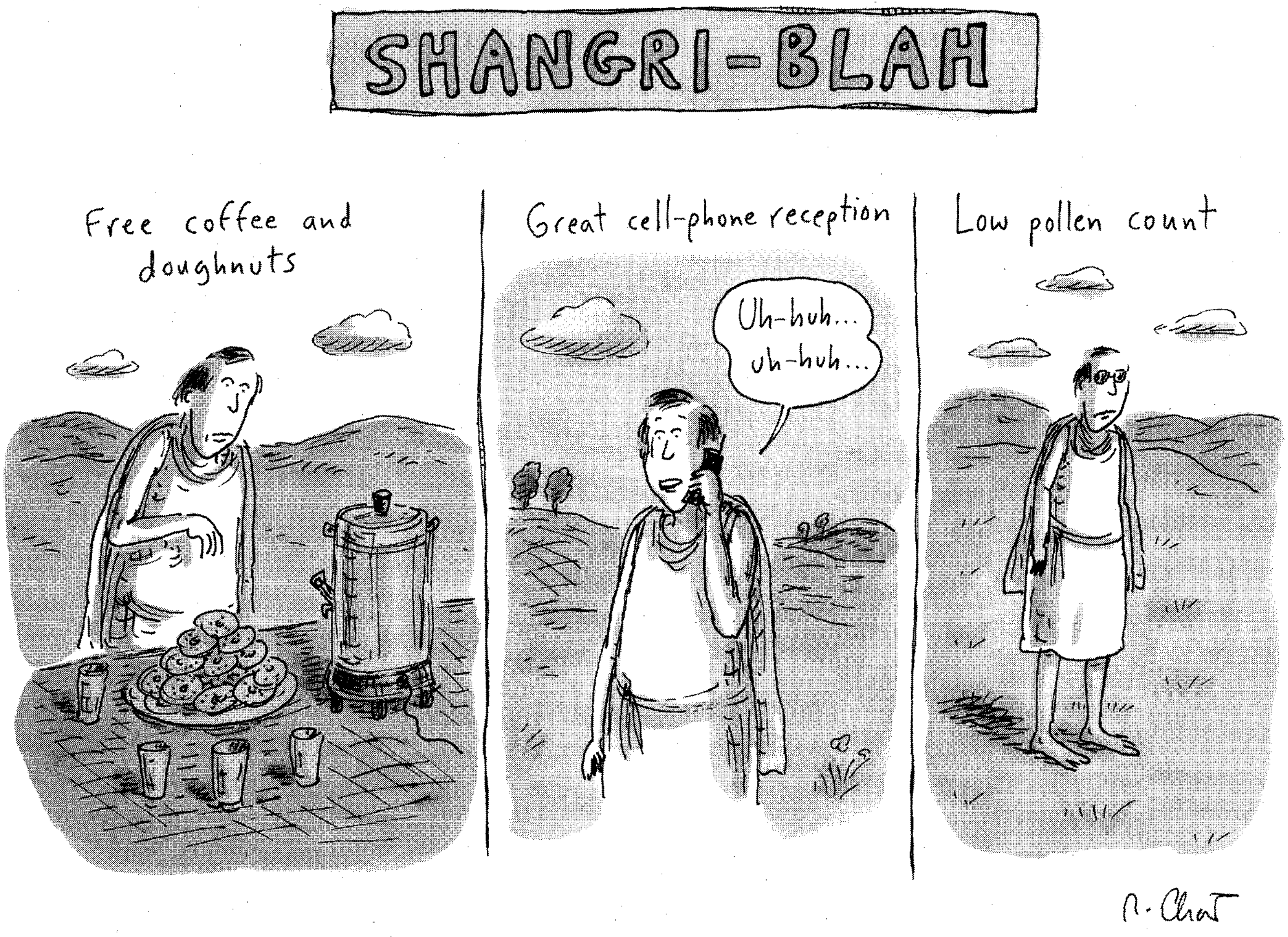
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—GARRY WILLS

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CONTRIBUTORS

John McPhee ("Checkpoints," p. 56), a staff writer, met with his first *New Yorker* fact-checker forty-six years ago. He is the author of twenty-eight books, including "Silk Parachute," which will be published later this year.

Adam Gopnik (The Talk of the Town, p. 35) has been writing for the magazine since 1986. His Postscript draws from his introduction to John Updike's 2008 Jefferson Lecture in the Humanities.

Jerome Groopman ("That Buzzing Sound," p. 42) was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in October. He is the author of, most recently, "How Doctors Think," which is available in paperback.

Evan Osnos ("The Promised Land," p. 50) is a staff writer and the author of the blog Letter from China, on newyorker.com. He is working on a book about foreigners in China.

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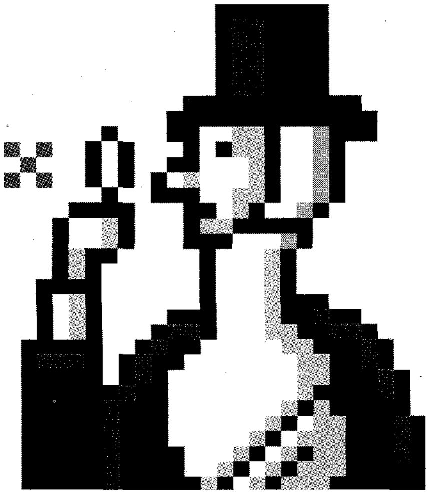
Sasha Frere-Jones (Pop Music, p. 98) writes about pop music for the magazine.

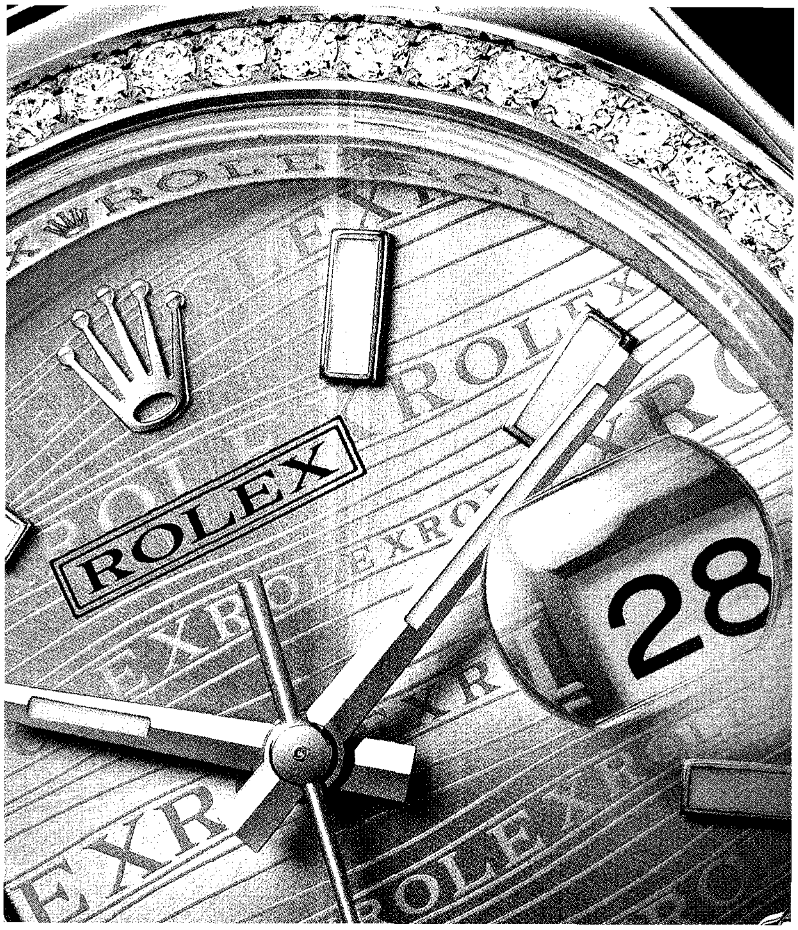
Claudia Roth Pierpont (Books, p. 102) is the author of "Passionate Minds," a book of essays about women writers.

Joan Acocella (Dancing, p. 114) reviews dance and books for the magazine. Her collection of essays "Twenty-eight Artists and Two Saints" is out in paperback.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

Tributes to *John Updike* by *Julian Barnes*, *Jonathan Lethem*, *Joyce Carol Oates*, and others. / Share your memories of Updike. / Video: *George Packer* tours the Tampa suburbs. / *Evan Osnos* launches a new blog, Letter from China, and narrates an audio slide show about Africans in Guangzhou. / *Sasha Frere-Jones* takes readers' questions about music. / The Book Bench, the Cartoon Lounge, and blogs by *Hendrik Hertzberg*, *Steve Coll*, and *James Surowiecki*. / A slide show of Tilley contest winners. / From the archives: hundreds of short stories, poems, and articles by Updike, and every issue back to 1925.




ROLEX
28

THE MAIL

THE GREEN ECONOMY

In Elizabeth Kolbert's piece on Van Jones and his attempt to address both poverty and the environmental crisis, the Harvard professor Robert Stavins suggests that it might not be effective to address climate and poverty together ("Greening the Ghetto," January 12th). If climate were purely a technical issue—an efficiency challenge—he might be right. But climate disruption is at least as much about equity as efficiency. The prosperity that some of us enjoy is powered primarily by fossil fuels. If we are to deliver real climate solutions, we must build a new prosperity powered by efficient use of clean energy. This new prosperity must be "sustainable" not only in the sense that it can last but also in the sense that it works for a lot more people than our current (faltering) prosperity does. This is both a moral imperative and a practical political one. The rich cannot tell the poor, "Sorry, the atmosphere is already full of the emissions that created our prosperity, so there's no room for yours." If reducing emissions amounts to hoarding wealth, the coal and oil lobbies will successfully resist effective climate policy by appealing to the economic interests of the poor and the middle class. In order to avoid catastrophic climate disruption, our economic vision must include more broadly shared prosperity.

K. C. Golden
Policy Director, Climate Solutions
Seattle, Wash.

In Kolbert's article, I'm afraid I went too far in joking about my early failures in attempting to bring green jobs to Oakland, and inadvertently slighted the Nathan Cummings Foundation. To clarify: When I suggested that I felt we had "wasted" the first two grants, I did not mean that we had literally wasted them. The Cummings Foundation rigorously follows through with those upon whom it bestows grants, and repeatedly forced us to rethink our model and rework our plans. As a result, though we feared our efforts had been in vain, it turned out that they were not. In those first two years, we built a citywide coalition, developed legislation for a Green Jobs Corps, surveyed the local business landscape, won over labor leaders, and educated elected officials. All of that work blossomed locally in the third year. Then it exploded nationally in the fourth year. Cummings stood by us the whole way, as we continually improved. It stood by many other organizations, across the nation, as well, and is now the lead donor in financing the infrastructure for what has emerged as a national movement for "green jobs." Its philanthropy has had a transformative impact in a very short period of time.

Van Jones
Oakland, Calif.

Kolbert raises the pertinent question of whether it makes good policy sense to combine two apparently disparate goals: employing people, especially those in low-income brackets, and cleaning up the environment. I think that the nexus between green and jobs is clear: low-tech and decentralized solutions to environmental challenges. For example, instead of constructing giant wind or solar farms and miles of transmission lines, unleash armies of workers to retrofit existing buildings for conservation, utilizing passive solar water- or space-heating, and perhaps even small-scale, local wind and solar electrical generation. Put small-scale farmers back on the land through land-use laws and financial incentives; this would ultimately replace the current mega-industrial agriculture system with a web of local food economies. These are only two of the ways to put more people to work, creating more economic justice and requiring less fossil-fuel consumption.

Diane Jones
Boise, Idaho

•

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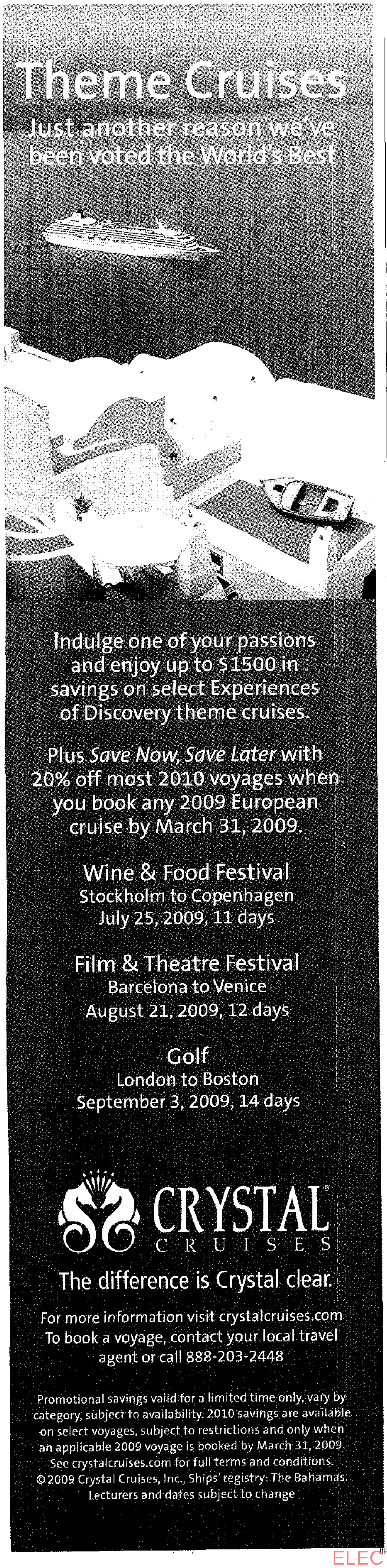
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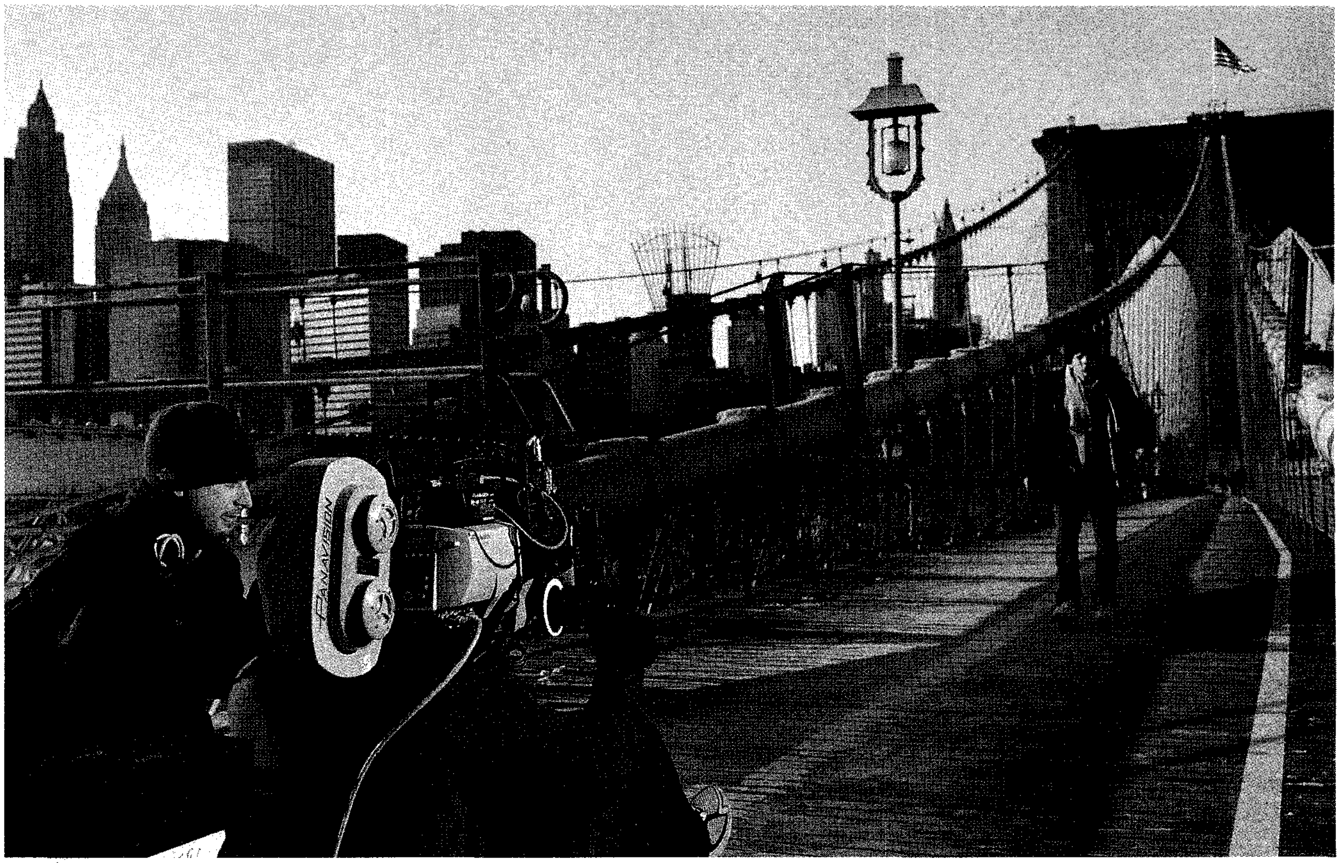

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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			4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17				

THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
BAVARIAN CREAM

Kristin Chenoweth stars in the Encores! production of "Music in the Air," a rarely performed musical from 1932, with music by Jerome Kern and a book and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II, about a Bavarian music teacher, his daughter, and her suitor. Gary Griffin directs. (See page 12.)

NIGHT LIFE
KINGS THINGS

The "Sounds Like Brooklyn" music festival features more than a hundred performances around Kings County over the next two weeks. The big shows are at the borough's biggest venue, the Brooklyn Academy of Music, where Beirut, Kaki King, Taylor McFerrin, Chairlift, and Clap Your Hands Say Yeah will strut their stuff. (See page 16.)

ART
MASTER PLAN

Pasadena's Norton Simon Museum and New York's Frick Collection have struck a deal: each institution will exhibit treasures from the other's collection. Five Old Master paintings from the Simon's collection—including the only signed and dated still-life by Francisco de Zurbarán—are now on view at the Frick. (See page 18.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
BACK ON THE BLOCK

George Steel—the head of Miller Theatre, then of Dallas Opera, now of New York City Opera—returns to conduct a Miller concert of his Vox Vocal Ensemble at the Church of St. Mary the Virgin. (See page 24.)

MOVIES
A WORLD APART

When segregation was the norm in much of the United States and Hollywood had little interest in the lives of African-Americans, an alternative cinema developed, produced by blacks for blacks, and its key figure was the director and producer Oscar Micheaux. The Film Society of Lincoln Center offers a retrospective of his films, including "Body and Soul," starring Paul Robeson, along with other movies made in the same separate system and a handful of related movies by white filmmakers (including King Vidor and Edgar G. Ulmer). (See page 28.)

The film "Holy Rollers," shooting on the Brooklyn Bridge. Photograph by Brian Finke.

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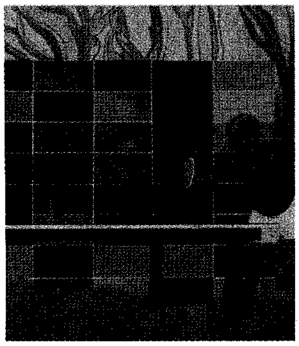
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
RETURN TRIP

Frank O'Hara pegged the going look of urbane sex appeal, in 1962, as "a little 'down,' a little effortless and helpless." He could have been forecasting the dominant fashion in painting almost fifty years later, exemplified in the resonant languors of Luc Tuymans and Elizabeth Peyton and positively exalted, to peaks of forthright ambivalence, by Peter Doig. Concurrent shows, at Michael Werner and Gavin Brown, of the Scots-born, Canadian-raised, English-educated Doig, who lives in Trinidad, answer the question "Why paint now?" with eloquent shrugs. His brushy landscapes and dreamlike or, better, half-awake visions of odd personages (notably "Man Dressed as Bat," in two versions, at Werner) variously recollect Munch, Klimt, Nolde, Matisse, Rothko, and other past masters, in a spirit less of homage than of smart despair. Doig's is an art up to its nostrils in historical quicksand. His raffish drawing and quite wonderfully seductive color promote this fix as our best available fun: post-everythingness, for the hip heck of it.

—*Peter Schjeldahl*


PETER DOIG, DETAIL FROM "PING PONG" (2006-08)

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

ASTRONOME: A NIGHT AT THE OPERA
Richard Foreman presents an opera with a score by John Zorn that explores religion and the lack thereof. Previews begin Feb. 5. Opens Feb. 10. (Ontological-Hysteric Theatre, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-352-3101.)

DISTRACTED
Cynthia Nixon stars in Lisa Loomer's comic drama, about a mother whose son may have attention-deficit disorder. Mark Brokaw directs the Roundabout Theatre Company production. Previews begin Feb. 7. (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

DOLLHOUSE
At St. Ann's Warehouse, Mabou Mines mounts its interpretation of Ibsen's "A Doll's House." Previews begin Feb. 12. Opens Feb. 15. (38 Water St. 718-254-8779.)

FIVE DAYS IN MARCH
Japan's Chelfitsch Theatre Company presents a play written and directed by Toshiki Okada, a love story about two Japanese hipsters. Feb. 5-7. (Japan Society, 333 E. 47th St. 212-832-1155.)

GUYS AND DOLLS
Oliver Platt, Craig Bierko, Kate Jennings Grant, and Lauren Graham star in the musical, with music and lyrics by Frank Loesser and a book by Jo Swerling and Abe Burrows. Des McAnuff directs. In previews. (Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 212-307-4100.)

KASPAR HAUSER
The Flea commissioned this play by Elizabeth Swados and Erin Courtney, about a mysterious boy found in Nuremberg, Germany, in 1828, who had lived in a dungeon his entire life. Previews begin Feb. 13. (41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

LEAH'S TRAIN
National Asian American Theatre Company presents a play by Karen Hartman, about three generations of women in a Russian Jewish family. Jean Randich directs; the cast includes Jennifer Ikeda. Previews begin Feb. 6. Opens Feb. 10. (TBG, 312 W. 36th St. 212-868-4444.)

LOVE/STORIES (OR BUT YOU WILL GET USED TO IT)
The Flea presents the world première of five one-act theatre-themed plays by Itamar Moses. Michelle Tattenbaum directs. In previews. Opens Feb. 16. (41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA
Lili Taylor and Jena Malone star in the New Group's production of Eugene O'Neill's trilogy, based on the Oresteia, set in a New England town at the end of the Civil War. Scott Elliott directs. In previews. (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

MUSIC IN THE AIR
Kristin Chenoweth stars in a rarely staged Kern and Hammerstein musical from 1932. Gary Griffin directs the Encores! production. Feb. 5-8. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

OBERON THEATRE ENSEMBLE
For its twelfth-anniversary repertory season, the company presents "Much Ado About Nothing," along with a series called "American Rapture," which includes a play by William Saroyan and two by Alex Dinelaris. Opens Feb. 12. (Beckett, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

OTHELLO
The Shakespeare play, presented by Theatre for a New Audience and directed by Arin Arbus. Previews begin Feb. 14. (The Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010.)

RUINED
Manhattan Theatre Club and the Goodman Theatre present a drama by Lynn Nottage, about a businesswoman caught in the civil war in the Republic of Congo. Kate Whoriskey directs. In previews. Opens Feb. 10. (City Center, Stage I, at 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

SAILOR MAN / RUMSPRINGA
Ryan Iverson and Scott Peterman's "Sailor Man," directed by Peter James Cook (a hit at last year's New York Fringe Festival), is followed by Peter Zinn's "Rumspringa," at 45 Bleecker Street Theatre. In previews. Opens Feb. 11. (45 Bleecker St. 212-239-6200.)

THE SAVANNAH DISPUTATION
The New York première of a play by Evan Smith, directed by Walter Bobbie, about a religious Catholic woman who invites a missionary into her home. Marylouise Burke, Dana Ivey, Reed Birney, and Kellie Overbey star. Previews begin Feb. 6. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

SHIPWRECKED! AN ENTERTAINMENT—THE AMAZING ADVENTURES OF LOUIS DE ROUGEMENT (AS TOLD BY HIMSELF)
Primary Stages presents the New York première of a play by Donald Margulies ("Dinner with Friends"), an adventure set in nineteenth-century England. In previews. Opens Feb. 8. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

THE STORY OF MY LIFE
Neil Bartram wrote the score and Brian Hill wrote the book for this new musical, starring Will Chase and Malcolm Gets, about the relationship between a successful writer and his best friend, who never left home. Directed by Richard Maltby, Jr. In previews. (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

TELEPHONE
Foundry Theatre presents a play written by Ariana Reines and directed by Ken Ruf Schmoll. Previews begin Feb. 6. Opens Feb. 10. (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 212-352-0255.)

THAT PRETTY PRETTY; OR, THE RAPE PLAY
The world première of a play by Sheila Callaghan, about a screenwriter who contemplates including a pair of ex-strippers—who murder a right-wing pro-lifer—in his screenplay. Kip Fagan directs, at the Rattlestick. Previews begin Feb. 10. (224 Waverly Pl. 212-868-4444.)

33 VARIATIONS
Jane Fonda stars in a new play written and directed by Moisés Kaufman, about a musicologist studying Beethoven's fascination with a waltz. Previews begin Feb. 9. (O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.)

THIS BEAUTIFUL CITY
The Civilians ("Gone Missing") apply their interview-to-musical method to the subject of evangelical Christians, at the Vineyard. Written by Steven Cosson and Jim Lewis, with music and lyrics by Michael Friedman. In previews. (108 E. 15th St. 212-353-3366.)

THREE SISTERS
Classical Theatre of Harlem presents the Chekhov play, directed by Christopher McElroen. Previews begin Feb. 5. (Harlem Stage Gatehouse, 150 Convent Ave., at 135th St. 212-281-9240.)

UNCLE VANYA
Maggie Gyllenhaal, Peter Sarsgaard, Mamie Gummer, and Denis O'Hare star in the Chekhov play, directed by Austin Pendleton. In previews. Opens Feb. 12. (Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 212-352-3101.)

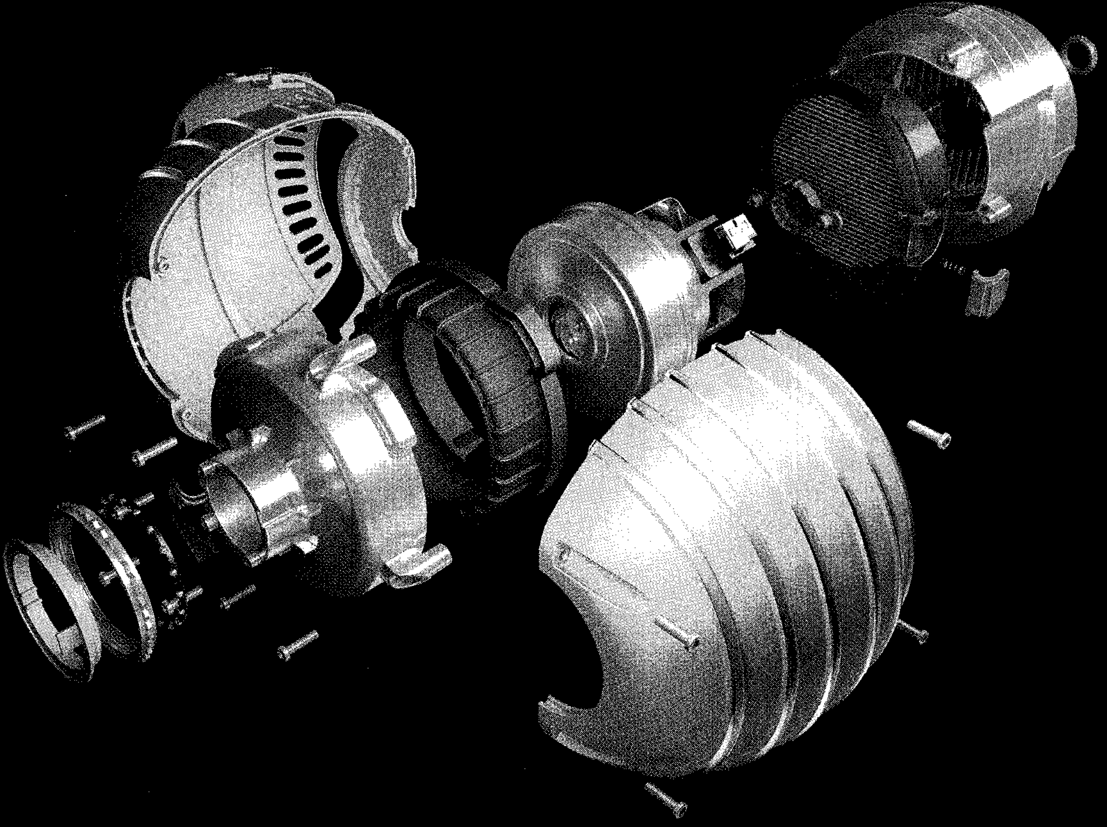
THE WIDOWING OF MRS. HOLROYD
The Mint presents this play written in 1914 by D. H. Lawrence, about a middle-class woman who comes to hate her working-class husband. In previews. (311 W. 43rd St. 212-315-0231.)

THE WINTER'S TALE
At BAM, in repertory with "The Cherry Orchard," the Bridge Project mounts the Shakespeare drama, starring Simon Russell Beale, Sinéad Cusack, Rebecca Hall, Richard Easton, Josh Hamilton, and Ethan Hawke. Sam Mendes directs. Previews begin Feb. 10. (Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100.)

YOU'RE WELCOME AMERICA. A FINAL NIGHT WITH GEORGE W BUSH
Will Ferrell wrote and performs a one-man comedy show, directed by Adam McKay. In previews. Opens Feb. 5. (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

NOW PLAYING

THE AMERICAN PLAN
Richard Greenberg's update of his début play, from 1990 (elegantly directed by David Grindley), set in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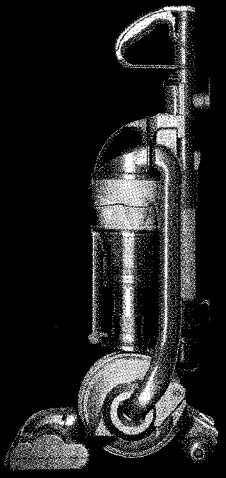

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the nineteen-sixties, opens on a lake in the Catskills. Lili (Lily Rabe), the beautiful but nervy daughter of a wealthy, manipulative German Jewish émigré, Eva (Mercedes Ruehl), meets Nick (Kieran Campion), who swims over from the hotel across the lake. As the plot unfolds, both Lili and Nick are shown to be wounded, ruthless, voracious souls who seek in each other some kind of magical deliverance. Eva, who claims to have been on the last boat out of Nazi Germany, is a tough piece of work, and Ruehl nails both her sinew and her sadism. Rabe is a cunning actor, blessed with a deep, compelling voice whose authority powerfully registers all the mercurial half notes of acerbity and panic; here she is pitch-perfect and distinguished. With the play's glib exposition, which smacks of romantic comedy, Greenberg reverses our narrative expectations and spins a psychologically astute, compelling study of narcissistic delusion, in which the payoff is not revenge but revelation about the stranglehold of symbiosis. (Reviewed in our issue of 2/2/09.) (Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

ARCHITECTING

The experimental theatre group the TEAM, in this nearly three-hour-long, overstuffed, and self-indulgent mashup of "Gone with the Wind" and post-Katrina New Orleans, mistakes naïveté for sincerity. In their hands, contemporary American experience consists solely of clichéd provincialism, bad Southern accents, twee musical breaks, and pretentious monologues about "force" and "history" that read like a college term paper. A subplot concerning a remake of "Gone with the Wind" helmed by a black director (played here by a white actor, who plays every black character in the piece, including Mammy) seems like a last-ditch attempt to preëmpt criticism of an all-white company's tackling some very racially charged material, seemingly to no particular end. (P.S. 122, First Ave. at 9th St. 212-352-3101. Through Feb. 15.)

ARISTOCRATS

In the summer of 1970, the grown children of a family of unhappy, eccentric, and mostly alcoholic Irish aristocrats come from all over Europe to the Hall—their crumbling country manse, in County Donegal, Ireland—for their youngest sister's wedding. Also present is an American scholar doing research into the Roman Catholic aristocracy in Britain, which he claims is a dying breed. Dying is right—the patriarch of the family, a successful barrister, keels over halfway through the play, leaving the wretched lot to decide the future (or lack thereof) of their sliver of the old world. Brian Friel's play was more relevant forty years ago, when the walls were still coming down, but today this revival is a very well acted museum piece. (132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

DISFARMER

St. Ann's Warehouse presents a new puppet-theatre work by Dan Hurlin, inspired by the life of the hermetic Arkansas portrait photographer Mike Disfarmer. (38 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779. Through Feb. 8.)

FLYOVERS

Richard Kind and Michele Pawk star in Jeffrey Sweet's play, about a film critic who returns to his Ohio home town. Sandy Shinner directs. (78th Street Theatre Lab, 236 W. 78th St. 212-868-4444. Through Feb. 15.)

FRESHWATER

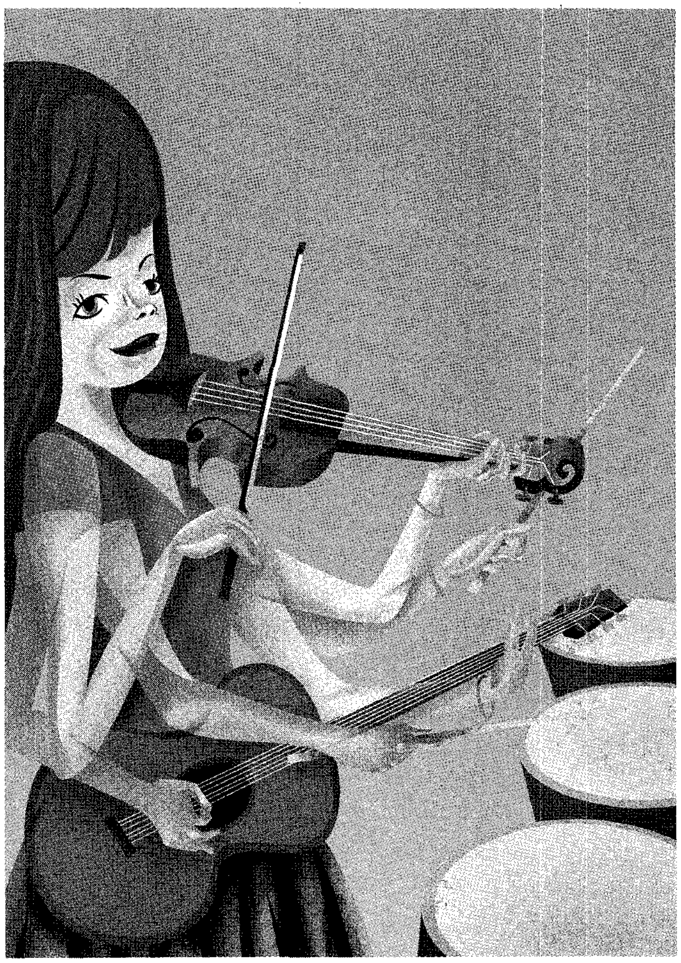
In 1923, Virginia Woolf wrote this comedy—inspired by her great-aunt, the photographer Julia Margaret Cameron—then forgot about it until 1935, when she rewrote it and promptly put it away again. The folderol, a kind of family knees-up, makes fun of artistic ambition and Bloomsbury snobbism, and has never been produced before. The director, Anne Bogart, gives this hokum as rollicking and handsome a production as it is ever likely to get. Be prepared to get up and sing "God Save the Queen," which is the only ceremony Woolf stands on. (Women's Project, 424 W. 55th St. 212-239-6200. Through Feb. 15.)

FREUDIAN SLIPS

The world première of a farce by Marvin Lifschitz, directed by Tom Bloom, in which Sigmund Freud has a showdown with his rival, Dr. Otto Brotto. (Abingdon, 312 W. 36th St. 212-868-4444. Through Feb. 15.)

HAMLET

The Japan-based Company East puts on a Zen-influenced production, incorporating Noh and modern dance. Kenji Kawarasaki directs and choreographs. (La Mama, 74A E. 4th St. 212-475-7710.)



The captivating performer Theresa Andersson visits Joe's Pub.

PUNY

HEDDA GABLER

Ian Rickson directs the Roundabout Theatre Company production, starring Mary-Louise Parker. (Reviewed in this issue.) (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.)

SIXTY MILES TO SILVER LAKE

Dan LeFranc's two-person drama, in première at SoHo Rep, traces the trajectory of a father-son relationship over the course of seven years of Saturday post-soccer-game car rides. When the play begins, Denny (Dane DeHaan) is earnest in his love of soccer and is protective of his mother, with whom he lives; Ky (Joseph Adams) is disdainful of the sport ("The two biggest scams in America are kids' soccer and the Catholic Church"), obsessed with the cleanliness of his Volvo, and angry at his ex-wife. In scenes that jump back and forth through time, the two characters are revealed to be essentially static—Denny always wants a decent father, Ky remains oblivious. Though the two actors, well directed by Anne Kauffman, do a masterly job, LeFranc's script is ultimately too one-sided to do his characters justice. (46 Walker St. 212-941-8632. Through Feb. 8.)

THE THIRD STORY

MCC puts on a new play by Charles Busch, who stars, with Kathleen Turner, in a farce that combines the fairy-tale, sci-fi, and gangster genres. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

TWELFTH NIGHT

J. R. Sullivan directs the Shakespeare comedy, at the Pearl. (80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802.)

Also Playing

AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY: Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BECKY SHAW:** Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422. **BILLY ELLIOT THE MUSICAL:** Imperial, 240 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE CHERRY ORCHARD:** BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100. **THE CONNECTION:** Living Theatre, 19 Clinton St. 212-352-3101. Through Feb. 13. **THE CRIPPLE OF INISHMAAN:** Atlantic Theatre Company, 336 W. 20th St. 212-279-4200. **EQUUS:** Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. Through Feb. 8. **GARDEN OF EARTHLY DELIGHTS:** Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane. 212-307-4100. **IN THE HEIGHTS:** Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-239-6200. **KRAPP, 39:** SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 212-691-1555. **LEAVES OF GLASS:** Peter J. Sharp, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. Through Feb. 8. **PAL JOEY:** *Studio 54, at 254* W. 54th St. 212-719-1300. **SHREK THE MUSICAL:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200. **SLEEPWALK WITH ME:** Bleecker Street Theatre, 45 Bleecker St. 212-239-6200. **SOUTH PACIFIC:** Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **SPEED-THE-PLOW:** Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **TERRE HAUTE:** 59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200. Through Feb. 15. **THE 39 STEPS:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

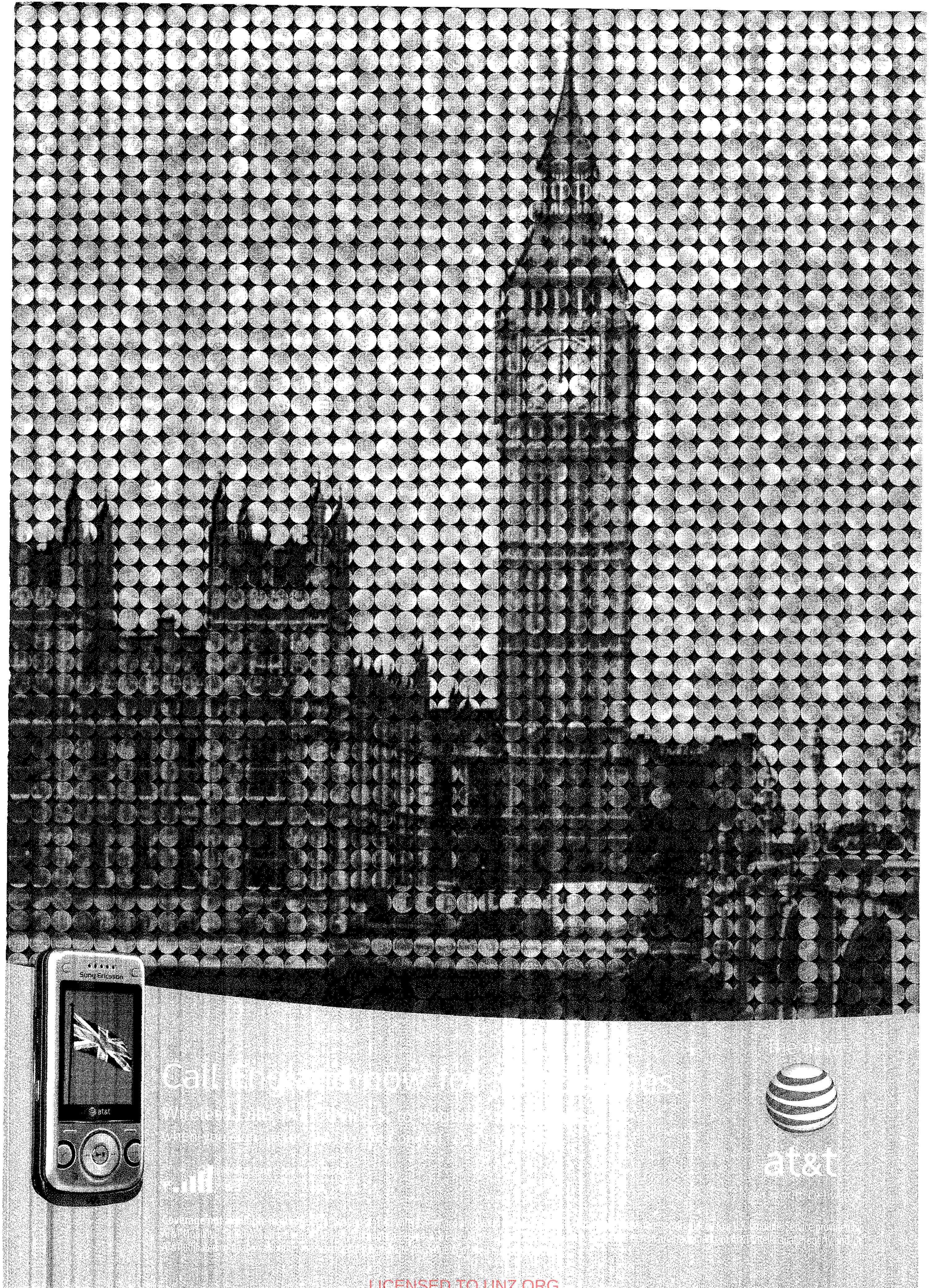
Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

APOLLO THEATRE

253 W. 125th St. (212-531-5300)—Feb. 6-7: The beguiling chanteuse **Cat Power** comes to town with songs from "Dark End of the Street," a new collection in her burgeoning catalogue of deeply affecting covers. Born Charlyn Marie Marshall, in Atlanta, Georgia, the singer, widely known for erratic, intensely intimate performances and occasional panic-filled meltdowns onstage, has had a long-standing affinity for spare chords and the warm Memphis sounds of sixties- and seventies-era Stax Records. She'll be backed by her Dirty Delta Blues band, which includes the Dirty Three drummer Jim White and the Jon Spencer Blues Explosion's Judah Bauer, on bass.

THE BELL HOUSE

149 7th St., between Second and Third Aves., Brooklyn. (718-643-6510)—Feb. 11: The **Submarines**, an electronic duo from L.A. Their first album, "Declare a New State!," documented the painful romantic breakup of the band members, Blake Hazard and John Dragonetti. The resulting ten songs of inventive pop were on the melancholy side. As fate would have it, the couple reconciled and married. Their new album, "Honeysuckle Weeks" (named after a supporting actress from the British TV series "Foyle's War"), has a happier sound. Feb. 12: Back in the era of late-nineties alternative music, **Tracy Bonham's** confessional rock struck a chord with fans of angry post-Alanis Morrisette heart-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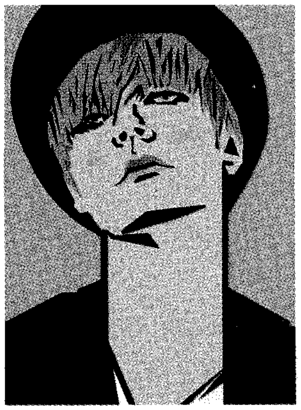
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
TRULLIE YOURS

On February 20, Lissy Trullie will perform at "Warhol Live," at the de Young Museum, in San Francisco. Some of the works on show include portraits of rock stars linked to Warhol, like the Velvet Underground and Mick Jagger. A former model, Trullie is a visual match for the event. Her high cheekbones, short blond hair, and bony way with a shirt put her in position to be the fifteenth or sixteenth Edie Sedgwick, and she has worked as a d.j. at Beatrice Inn, a spot popular with New York's young and beautiful. That's where the similarities end, though—Trullie doesn't behave like one of Warhol's doomed muses, nor is her music a low-energy descendant of the Velvet Underground. Trullie works with another homegrown aesthetic: the short, hard flashes and brisk pace of the Strokes. She is neither firecracker nor femme fatale—naming her new EP "Self-Taught Learner" was both honest and helpful. Trullie builds self-contained pop-rock songs. If she keeps it up, she should be able to quit her night job fairly soon.



KIM DEMARCO

—*Sasha Frere-Jones*

on-the-sleeve theatrics. Tastes, trends, and fortunes have shifted, but Bonham continues making her music.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Feb. 12: One of the more versatile and endearingly unclassifiable acts to rise out of the country music Mecca of Nashville, **Lambchop,** the brainchild of Kurt Wagner, plays lushly surreal songs that pay little attention to genre parameters.

BROOKLYN ACADEMY OF MUSIC
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn. (718-636-4100)—Feb. 6-7: The innovative guitarist and singer **Kaki King** and **Beirut,** an indie-pop band led by the young multi-instrumentalist and crooner Zach Condon, whose interests range from Gypsy rock to Jacques Brel. With **Taylor McFerrin** on the 6th. Feb. 13: The celebrated ensemble **Clap Your Hands Say Yeah** plays a retro-leaning blend of electronic pop. They are going on hiatus after this show. With the indie rockers **Chairlift,** whose atmospheric pop suggests the more whimsical moments of the Cure. (These shows are part of the "Sounds Like Brooklyn" music festival; for a full listing of performances, visit www.bam.org.)

CAKESHOP
152 Ludlow St. (212-253-0036)—Feb. 6: The boyfriend-girlfriend duo **Schwervon!** builds an impressive but not too serious wall of sound full of harmonies, distortion, wit, and wisecracks. They're here celebrating the release of their new album, "Low Blow," which is darker and heavier than their previous records but retains the couple's lighthearted spirit. With the rhythmically complex and ominous bass-and-drum duo the **Leader,** the theatrical piano-and-musical-saw outfit **Ching Chong Song,** and the lovably foul one-man band the **Purple Organ.**

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Feb. 6: The evocative singer and violinist **Theresa Andersson** was born in Sweden, but she's lived half her life in New Orleans, where she moved when she was eighteen. And like many other musicians from that humid city she's absorbed a lot of influences. They are not necessarily the ones that first come to mind. She engages in no soul singing, hardly any R. & B., and just a touch of jazz. Instead, the songs on Andersson's latest album, "Hummingbird, Go!," are a keen hybrid of spacey folk and psychedelic pop. She recorded the album in her kitchen, playing her regular instrument along with soda bottles and wineglasses full of water.

MAXWELL'S
1039 Washington St., Hoboken (201-653-1703)—Feb. 4: What's the best Midwestern band led by a woman who's a triple-threat singer-songwriter-guitarist? The old money might be on the Pretenders, but check out the **Heartless Bastards,** a power trio from Dayton, Ohio. The voice of their front woman, Erika Wennerstrom, is a primal force.

(LE) POISSON ROUGE
158 Bleecker St. (212-796-0741)—Feb. 5: **Shilpa Ray and Her Happy Hookers.** Ray's somber wail combines coarse soul and bittersweet jazz. Pumping her harmonium, she leads her band through lyrically surreal but emotionally evocative songs. With the **New York Howl,** a group with horns, electric guitar, and organ fronted by a lanky, big-lipped, and big-haired singer, Andrew Katz. Their down-and-dirty sound evokes the sixties. Feb. 10: The **Necks** are a passionate cult piano trio from Melbourne, Australia, who specialize in free-form improvisation. Formed in 1987, and with thousands of performances under its belt, the group has developed a kind of musical telepathy. Feb. 11: **John Wesley Harding's** first record came out in 1990, and his Dylan-inspired name and Costello-inflected vocals set the stage for a career that has featured solid songwriting in a variety of genres. His latest album, "Who Was Changed and Who Was Dead," which comes out next month, was recorded with the Minus Five. This appearance is the first in a series of three being called his "Cabinet of Wonders," with a rotating cast of guest performers—this time around they are the novelist **Rick Moody** and the comedian **Eugene Mirman.**

TERMINAL 5
610 W. 56th St. (212-582-6600)—Feb. 6-7: The **Black Keys** are two friends from Akron, Ohio—the singer and guitarist Dan Auerbach and the guitarist Patrick Carney. They used to mow lawns together; now they create earth-shaking blues rock. With the **Heartless Bastards** (see Maxwell's).

UNION POOL
484 Union Ave., Brooklyn (718-609-0484)—Feb. 12: The singer-songwriter **Diane Cluck's** guitar playing lays the tracks for a sensual and melancholic journey through love and landscape. She earned accolades on the local scene, though she now lives a quiet life in Georgia growing vegetables. With **Dufus,** solo. The rotating cast of Dufus, growing and shrinking in the band's ten years, has included Regina Spektor and Kimya Dawson. Sometimes the experimental-folk band is as big as fifteen people, and sometimes it's only one, the very tall and bearded songwriter Seth Faergolzia.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL
59 W. 44th St. (212-840-6800)—Feb. 3-21: The singer and pianist **Tony DeSare** toasts the lyricist Johnny Mercer in his new show. Expect DeSare to also slip in a few originals from his clever concept album, "Radio Show."

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Feb. 4-7: The **Lewis Nash** quintet. Lewis, an elegant mainstream drummer, is joined by, among others, the trumpeter **Jeremy Pelt** and the pianist **Renee Rosnes.** Feb. 10-14: The vocalist **Hilary Kole** is joined by the guitarist **John Pizzarelli** on her forthcoming album, "Haunted Heart," as well as on three nights of this run, Feb. 10-11 and Feb. 12.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Feb. 3-8: The **Yellowjackets** receive an infusion of energy from their guest, the guitar hero **Mike Stern.** Feb. 10-15: The jazz singer **Cassandra Wilson,** who was responsible for one of the sharpest recordings of last year, the luminous "Loverly."

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)— Feb. 17: The **Bad Plus** has been expanding its musical palette. The trio's latest album, "For All I Care," continued its M.O. of covering outré pop fare (Nirvana's "Lithium," the Bee Gees' "How Deep Is Your Love"), but it shook things up by adding a singer, **Wendy Lewis,** who will also be joining them for this show.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Feb. 3-8: Eighty years old and still ready to rumble, the saxophonist **Benny Golson** has put together a diamond-hard sextet featuring the trumpeter **Eddie Henderson** and the trombonist **Steve Davis** to showcase songs from his "New Time, New 'Tet" album.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Feb. 5-8: The pianist **Barry Harris,** a revered second-generation bebopper, is as close to the genuine spirit of the genre as any musician still working today. Feb. 12-15: Anyone who bought a jazz-pop album during the seventies will recognize the names in **L'Image,** a collaboration of ace session men, including **Mike Mainieri, Warren Bernhardt, Steve Gadd, David Spinozza,** and **Tony Levin.** Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER
Broadway at 60th St. (212-721-6500)—Feb. 6-7: The pianist **Eddie Palmieri,** the doyen of dyed-in-the-wool Latin jazz, heats up the Rose Theatre with his La Perfecta II ensemble. Feb. 12-14, also in the Rose Theatre: The fiftieth anniversaries of two of jazz's seminal albums, Miles Davis's "Kind of Blue" and John Coltrane's "Giant Steps," are acknowledged in style by the vocal group **Take**

Six, the pianist **Mulgrew Miller,** the saxophonists from the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra, and the drummer **Jimmy Cobb,** who contributed to both classic recordings. Feb. 13-14: Three über-romantic performers—the singer **Freddy Cole,** the pianist **Bill Charlap,** and the saxophonist **Houston Person**—offer an elegant Valentine's night out in the Allen Room.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Feb. 8: **Rashied Ali,** John Coltrane's last drummer, is a free-jazz pioneer with a latent penchant for hard bop, which he proves as the leader of a muscular quintet. Feb. 10-11: Some of the most satisfying playing to be heard from the accomplished pianist and composer **Kenny Werner** emerges when he's joined by his regular trio-mates, the bassist **Johannes Weidenmueller** and the drummer **Ari Hoenig.** Feb. 13-15: The bassist, singer, and songwriter **Esperanza Spalding** has talent, charisma, and potential. Her musical identity isn't firmly established yet (she's just twenty-four), but watching her mature promises to be rewarding. The Mingus tribute bands are in rotation on Mondays.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Feb. 3-8: During its week to shine, the **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra,** which normally performs here on Monday nights only, showcases its enviable ensemble unity, strutting soloists, and whip-smart charts. Feb. 10-15: The **Paul Motian Trio 3 in 1.** This interactive threesome brings together a brilliant iconoclast, the drummer Motian, with two considerably younger, immensely gifted players, the saxophonist **Chris Potter** and the pianist **Jason Moran.**

ZANKEL HALL
Carnegie Hall, 57th St. at Seventh Ave. (212-247-7800)—Feb. 10: Touring for the first time in two decades in support of his mesmerizing new album, "Last Night the Moon Came Dropping Its Clothes in the Street," the legendary sonic pioneer **Jon Hassell** brings his electronically equipped trumpet and a quintet that makes use of violin and a host of manipulated samples to conjure up his "Fourth World" musical environment.

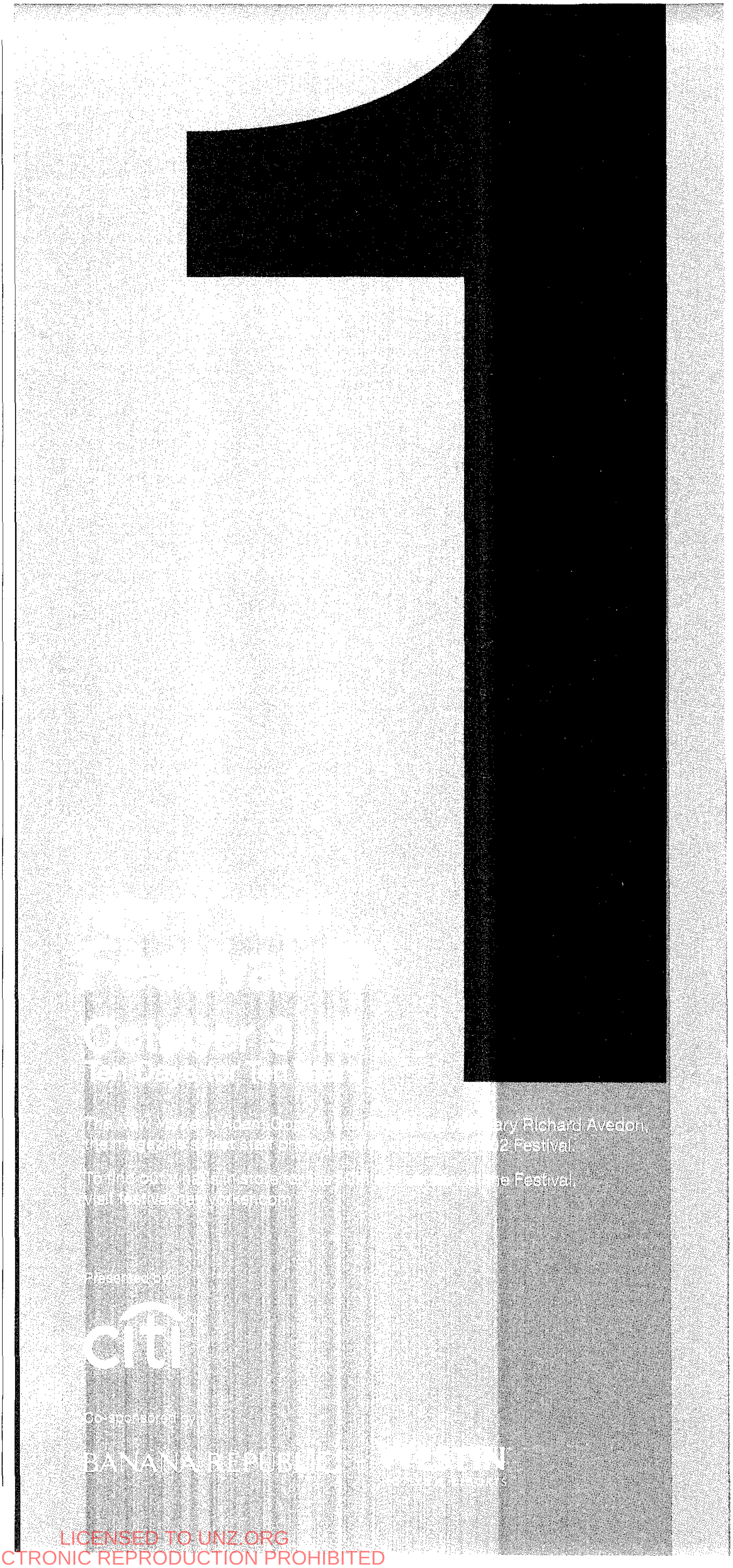
ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Beyond Babylon: Art, Trade, and Diplomacy in the Second Millennium B.C."** Through March 15. ♦ **"Pierre Bonnard: The Late Interiors."** Through April 19. ♦ **"Raphael to Renoir: Drawings from the Collection of Jean Bonna."** Through April 19. ♦ **"Art and Love in Renaissance Italy."** Through Feb. 16. ♦ **"Raqib Shaw."** Through March 1. ♦ **"Calder Jewelry."** Through March 1. ♦ **"Walker Evans and the Picture Postcard."** Through May 25. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Marlene Dumas: Measuring Your Own Grave."** Through Feb. 16. ♦ **"A Shimmer of Possibility: Photographs by Paul Graham."** Opens Feb. 4. ♦ **"Words in Freedom: Futurism at 100."** Opens Feb. 13. ♦ **"Vik Muniz: Rebus."** Through Feb. 23. ♦ **"The Printed Picture."** Through June 1. ♦ **"Performance 1: Tehching Hsieh."** Through May 18. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"The Third Mind: American Artists Contemplate Asia, 1860-1989."** Through April 19. ♦ **"Kandinsky and Expressionist Painting Before World War I."** Ongoing. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 7:45.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3600)—**"Alexander Calder: The Paris Years, 1926-1933."** Through Feb. 15. ♦ **"Alex Bag."** Mister Rogers



has left the neighborhood. Bag makes her solo museum début with a video—a beyond inappropriate children's television show—that combines original footage with excerpts from "The Patchwork Family," a kooky syndicated program that her mother hosted in the seventies. Bag reads aloud from Sartre's "Nausea" to an audience of uncomprehending tots; a tattooed and strung-out-looking troubadour croons David Bowie and Neil Young. At one point, the artist confesses to a dragon puppet (part Puff the Magic Dragon, part Triumph the Insult Comic Dog), "My shrink says I need to reach a certain state of panic before I can get things done." Bag puts a hilariously perverse spin on the parodic tradition of performance-based video—her piece is to "Sesame Street" as Martha Rosler's "Semiotics of the Kitchen" is to "The Martha Stewart Show." Through April 30. ♦ **"Elad Lassry: Three Films."** Through April 30. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM

200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"The Black List Project: Timothy Greenfield-Sanders and Elvis Mitchell."** Through March 29. ♦ **"Burning Down the House: Building a Feminist Art Collection."** Through April 5. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Climate Change: The Threat to Life and a New Energy Future."** Through Aug. 16. ♦ **"The Butterfly Conservatory: Tropical Butterflies Alive in Winter."** Through May 25. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

FRICK COLLECTION

1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**"Masterpieces of European Painting from the Norton Simon Museum."** Opens Feb. 10. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY

1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—**"Edward Steichen: In High Fashion."** Through May 3. ♦ **"Weird Beauty: Fashion Photography Now."** Through May 3. ♦ **"This Is Not a Fashion Photograph."** Through May 3. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

JEWISH MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**"Chagall and the Artists of the Russian Jewish Theatre, 1919-1949."** Through March 22. ♦ **"The Sound of Light by Julianne Swartz."** Entering a permanent exhibition, which tracks Jewish history across the centuries, visitors are issued an electronic horn, cast in frosted plastic and shaped like a giant slug with a trumpet at one end. A sonic treasure hunt commences, in which the murmur of static issuing from the trumpet resolves into clear audio at designated spots. These listening posts are marked with spotlit placards, and the horn glows blue when receiving a good signal. One hears music, running water, a ticking clock, an old woman and a child reading Shel Silverstein's "The Giving Tree" in unison. The piece is oblique in the extreme, but also quietly uplifting. Through March 1. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, and Thursdays, 11 to 8.)

MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM

225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"On the Money: Cartoons for *The New Yorker*."** Through May 24. ♦ **"The Thaw Collection of Master Drawings: Acquisitions Since 2002."** Through May 3. ♦ **"Protecting the Word: Bookbindings of the Morgan."** Through March 29. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Fifth Ave. at 103rd St. (212-534-1672)—**"Eudora Welty in New York: Photographs of the Early 1930s."** Through Feb. 16. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

NEW MUSEUM

235 Bowery, at Prince St. (212-219-1222)—**"Jeremy Deller: It Is What It Is, Conversations about Iraq."** Opens Feb. 11. ♦ **"Daria Martin: Minotaur."** Through March 8. ♦ **"Mathias Poledna: Crystal Palace."** Through March 8. (Open Wednesdays and weekends, noon to 6, and Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 10.)

ONASSIS CULTURAL CENTER

645 Fifth Ave., at 51st St. (212-486-4448)—**"Worshipping Women: Ritual and Reality in Classical Athens."** An impressive roundup of vases, grave stelae, and statuary depicts the role of women in ancient Greece. There are the expected images of goddesses: Aphrodite, Athena, and lesser-known deities such as Hekate (goddess of ghosts and purification) and Kybele (protectress of the household). But most poignant, perhaps, are the anonymous mortals commemorated in such objects as a statuette of a girl, offered as a token of thanks to the gods for the successful delivery of a child, and a lovely marble grave marker carved with the image of a woman clasping a man's hand in farewell, both from the fourth century B.C. Through May 9. (Open Mondays through Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

QUEENS MUSEUM OF ART

Flushing Meadows-Corona Park (718-592-9700)—**"Queens International 4."** Through April 26. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, noon to 5.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

DIANA KINGSLEY

Kingsley's high-impact color photographs feel like inside jokes. You're not sure whether they're funny, mean, or just plain weird. Her milieu appears vaguely high-Wasp—Tina Barney territory, seen from the other side of the looking glass. Kingsley crops her subjects so tightly that only fragments remain, often in surreal juxtaposition: black balloons in the garden, the flank of a sleek black horse in the drawing room, a dog's ears and a yellow tennis ball in the bedroom. At night, a woman's white-gloved hand holds a cigarette up to an overblown gardenia as if they're having an inebriated conversation. Say what? Through Feb. 28. (Castelli, 18 E. 77th St. 212-249-4470.)

"PARSING SPIRITUALITY"

A quote from Kandinsky's book "Concerning the Spiritual in Art" provides the epigram to this group show, which identifies a recent turn away from the rational in contemporary art. Melissa A. Calderón's installation of cascading tissues stained with her own tears and a photographic self-portrait in which Janine Antoni tenderly cradles her own foot—a one-woman Madonna and Child—use religious iconography as a springboard. Others return to the traditional view of the landscape as a vehicle for the sublime, including Xaviera Simmons's photographs of mysterious rituals enacted outdoors and Sebastian Bremer's delicately etched miniature of a nocturnal sky. Through Feb. 17. (Affirmation Arts, 523 W. 37th St. 212-925-0092.)

"TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION"

One of the city's longest-running photography galleries salutes itself with an exhibition that provides a quick sketch of its idiosyncratic history. Two of the gallery's prime attractions, Helen Levitt and Ray K. Metzker, open the show with a pair of quiet knockouts that slip between representation and abstraction. They have strong support from Michael Spano, Stephane Couturier, Val Telberg, and other reliable Miller mainstays, but what keeps the show popping is a few surprises from the inventory, including a Polaroid of the shape-shifter Yasumasa Morimura as Greta Garbo, Bruce Wrighton's unexpectedly lovely color shot of a public bathroom, and Yasuhiro Ishimoto's heady evocation of the Playboy Club circa 1950. Through March 7. (Laurence Miller, 20 W. 57th St. 212-397-3930.)

Short List

PATRICIA COFFIE: Boone, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-752-2929. Through Feb. 14. **PETER DOIG:** Werner, 4 E. 77th St. 212-988-1623. Through March 14. **ELLIOTT ERWITT:** Houk, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-750-7070. Through March. 7. **MATTA:** Pace Wildenstein, 32 E. 57th St. 212-421-3292. Through Feb. 28. **FRED SANDBACK:** Zwirner & Wirth, 32 E. 69th St. 212-517-8677. Through Feb. 28. **ALEC SOTH:** Gagosian, 980 Madison, at 76th St. 212-744-2313. Through March 7. **LAWRENCE WEINER:** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-581-5187. Through Feb. 21.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

ROBERT BARRY

Barry is a Conceptualist—he makes language to be looked at. In this show, whose works date back to 1962, words are spelled out in cast acrylic on the floor and linked in vinyl phrases on the wall. The painted words "suggest," "continue," "remind," "against," and "instead" radiate in a yellow circle on canvas. The formal properties of text seem as important to Barry as what it can convey, as signalled by a red-and-black checkerboard painting from 1962, which functions as a quiet interlude amid all the visual discourse. Through Feb. 7. (Lambert, 550 W. 21st St. 212-242-3611.)

JANET BIGGS

A ten-minute video pairs two seemingly unrelated scenes: a gospel chorus belting out a song (with lyrics written by Biggs) and a motorcycle racer speeding across the otherworldly landscape of Utah's Bonneville Salt Flats. The subjects connect through their backstories: the biker, Leslie Porterfield, suffered an accident on the Flats in 2007 and, like the singers in Harlem's Addicts Rehabilitation Center Choir, has overcome adversity. The work lifts its title, "Vanishing Point," from a cult road movie, whose aimless plot could be summed up as "going nowhere fast." The reference, which adds little, seems aimed at hipster cred. But never mind, because Biggs's video is a visually—and aurally—transporting ride. Through Feb. 7. (Oliver, 513 W. 26th St. 212-929-5949.)

PETER ROSTOVSKY

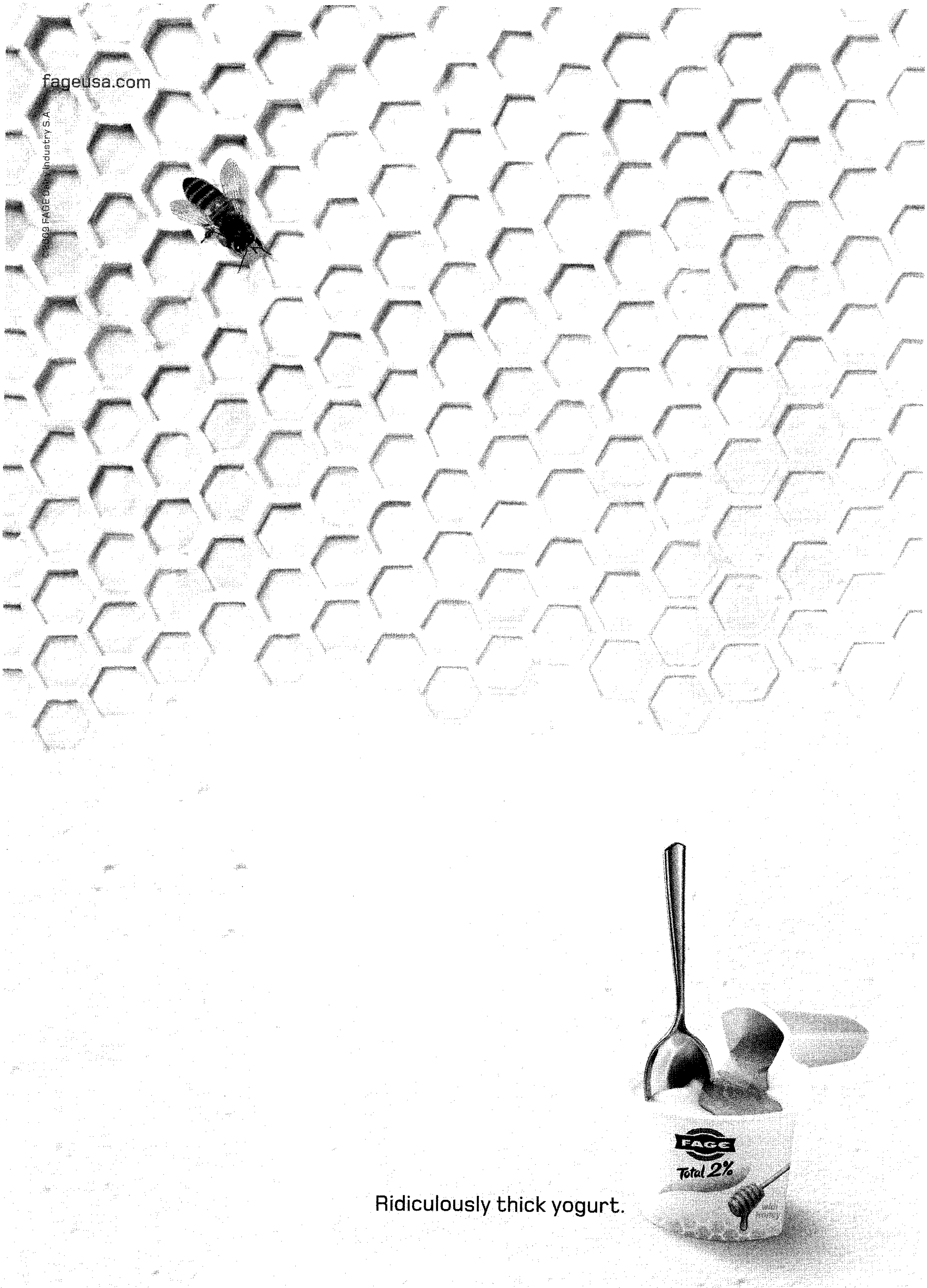
The artist has spent a decade meditating on mediation in art. The oil-on-linen works in his début at the gallery are all based on photographs; some were shot by Rostovsky; others he scavenged online. Gymnasts hover, inverted, in space; a sports stadium is depicted from an abstracting aerial perspective; a gas burner glows, mandalalike, on a stove. Rostovsky's paintings owe much to Gerhard Richter (the hand that launched a thousand conceptual Photo-Realists), but they nonetheless offer insights into the mysteries of representation once-removed. Through Feb. 14. (Meltzer, 525-531 W. 26th St. 212-727-9330.)

AARON SISKIND

This master of photographic abstraction always grounded his work in the real world—in peeling plaster, broken windows, paint-slathered walls, and tar on concrete. When Siskind's sources aren't immediately recognizable, their gritty physicality gives them a nice visual traction, and when his subject is evident it's thrilling to watch it dissolve into nothing but form and texture. The hundred and one photographs in this museum-quality exhibition are organized by series to show Siskind working through variations on a theme: grasses as brushstrokes, seaweed as calligraphy, a distressed wall as an expressionist canvas. His inventiveness is casual, instinctive, and irresistible. Through March 7. (Silverstein, 535 W. 24th St. 212-627-3930.)

"CONTRADICTIONS IN BLACK AND WHITE"

Black-and-white photography has been declared dead for nearly as long as painting. But it continues to thrive, perhaps because, in the hands of good photographers, it's far from conventional. Witness this shrewdly edited survey of historic and contemporary work, most of which blurs the line between representation and abstraction. Adam Fuss's billowing smoke, Harry Callahan's sun-dappled grasses, and Michael Flomen's cosmic firefly traces and darkened field of snow stand in for the natural world in an otherwise man-made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environment built up shot by shot by Ray K. Metzker, Nathan Harger, Margaret Bourke-White, and Vera Lutter. Through Feb. 28. (Hasted Hunt, 529 W. 20th St. 212-627-0006.)

Short List

RICHARD ALDRICH: Bortolami, 510 W. 25th St. 212-727-2050. Through Feb. 28. **GUY DE COINTET:** Greene Naftali, 508 W. 26th St. 212-463-7770. Through Feb. 14. **LOTHAR HEMPEL / EBERHARD HAVEKOST:** Kern, 532 W. 20th St. 212-367-9663. Opens Feb. 12. **MATTHEW HIGGS:** Murray Guy, 453 W. 17th St. 212-463-7372. Through Feb. 21. **THOMAS HIRSCHHORN:** Gladstone, 530 W. 21st St. 212-206-7606. Opens Feb. 13. **TEUN HOCKS:** P.P.O.W, 511 W. 25th St. 212-647-1044. Through Feb. 14. **PIERO MANZONI:** Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 212-741-1111. Through March 21. **MIKA ROTTENBERG:** Klagsbrun, 526 W. 26th St. 212-243-3335. Through Feb. 28. **FRED SANDBACK:** Zwirner, 525-533 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070. Through Feb. 14.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

PAM LINS
Why pit painting against sculpture or sculpture against pedestal, when you can combine all three? Each of Lins's tall plywood boxes is embellished with stripes and topped off with colorful paintings on wood. Several are inset with plaster reliefs of owls—pitting the linear, abstract, and colorful against the curving, representational, and spectral. The over-all effect of Lins's hybrids is somewhere between a slapdash craft project and a canny critique of high modernism. Through Feb. 8. (Uffner, 47 Orchard St. 212-274-0064.)

"PULP FICTION"
Seven artists put paper through its paces. Philippe Perrot paints winsome, ethereal figures. Elizabeth Neel advances the case for abstraction. Simone Shubuck repurposes found paper; even the backs of vintage photographs are fair game. Michael Wetzel's mixed-media paintings on paper feature Vesuvius, emblem of ancient destruction and artistic Grand Tour-ism. Volker Hueller accents his trippy, Cocteau-esque etchings with watercolor and shellac. Halsey Hathaway slices magazines into optically challenging compositions. Phillip Estlund's collages mix interiors with otherworldly and botanical elements, while Ishmael Randall Weeks's translucent black-and-white photo-transfers of Le Corbusier buildings are augmented by fanciful paper cutouts. Paper, it seems, can do just about anything. Through Feb. 8. (Eleven Rivington, 11 Rivington St. 212-982-1930.)

Short List

ERIKA BAUM: Dispatch, 127 Henry St. 212-227-2783. Opens Feb. 15. **FRANCESCA DIMATTIO:** Salon 94 Freemans, 1 Freeman Alley. 212-529-7400. Through March 29. **PETER DOIG:** Brown, 620 Greenwich St. 212-627-5258. Through Feb. 21. **JASON FOX:** Blum, 99 Wooster St. 212-431-0443. Through March 7. **BRUCE NAUMAN:** Freeman, 560 Broadway, at Prince St. 212-966-5154. Through Feb. 21. **SETH PRICE:** Spaulings, 165 East Broadway. 212-477-5006. Through Feb. 22.

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
Balanchine's one-act "Swan Lake," which in recent years has been replaced here by Peter Martins's fast-paced two-act version, is built around the ballet's moon-drenched lakeside scenes; it is paired with another rarely seen piece, "Slaughter on Tenth Avenue," a dance-hall number originally made for the musical "On Your Toes." Balanchine's masterly leotard ballet "Stravinsky Violin Concerto" shares a program with the demonic "La Valse" (set to Ravel) and Robbins's "West Side Story Suite." The second and final new work of the season, "A Simple Symphony," made by the former N.Y.C.B. dancer Melissa Barak, is a playful piece in the neo-classical vein, set to music by Benjamin Britten, featuring the blossoming Sara Mearns. ♦ Feb. 4 at 7:30, Feb. 7 at 2 and 8, Feb. 13 at 8, and Feb. 15 at 3: "Stravinsky Violin Concerto," "La Valse," and "West Side Story Suite." ♦ Feb. 5 at 8 and Feb. 11 at 7:30: "Divertimento No. 15," "Stabat Mater," and "Brahms/Handel." ♦ Feb. 6 at 8, Feb. 8 at 3, and Feb. 10 at 7:30: "Concerto Barocco," "Oltremare," and "Tchaikovsky Suite No. 3." ♦ Feb. 12 at 8 and Feb. 14 at 2 and 8: "Swan Lake," "The Steadfast Tin Soldier," "Romeo and Juliet," and "Slaughter on Tenth Avenue." ♦ Feb. 17 at 7:30: "Slice to Sharp," "Hallelujah Junction," "A Simple Symphony," and "Mercurial Manoeuvres." (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500. Through March 1.)

BUGLISI DANCE THEATRE
Jacqulyn Buglisi celebrates the fifteenth anniversary of her troupe, with two programs that include her powerful piece "Suspended Women." (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Feb. 3-4 at 7:30, Feb. 5-6 at 8, Feb. 7 at 2 and 8, and Feb. 8 at 2 and 7:30.)

"FIREFALL"
The mind-bending, multidisciplinary theatre artist John Jesurun isn't a choreographer per se, but his imaginative integration of text, set, and video recalls the stylistic control of the great choreographer-directors. Here, he sets his cast and his script against a Hal-like Web site that threatens to take over the show. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Feb. 4-7 at 7:30.)

YVONNE MEIER
Meier, a witty, Swiss-born New York eccentric, likes her props. In her new piece "Stolen," they include aluminum foil to hide in, a table to strap to a dancer's back, and extension cords and ropes to do the strapping. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 866-811-4111. Feb. 5-7 at 8:30.)

CUNNINGHAM REPERTORY UNDERSTUDY GROUP / DANCES BY ISADORA
On Feb. 6, the Cunningham Repertory Understudy Group presents two of Merce Cunningham's seldom seen works, "Rune" (1959) and "Squaregame MinEvent" (1976). On Feb. 8, Dances by Isadora, directed by the choreographer and Duncan specialist Catherine Gallant, revives two works by Isadora Duncan. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Feb. 6 at noon and Feb. 8 at 3.)

"TAOUB"
Groupe Acrobatique de Tanger, a troupe of Moroccan street acrobats, encamp at the kid-friendly New Victory, dressed up for the stage by the French physical-theatre director Aurélien Bory. The title of the production refers to fabric, upon which trompe-l'oeil images are projected and cast members bounce, trampoline-style, driven and spiced by North African music. (209 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010. Feb. 6 and Feb. 13 at 7, Feb. 7 and Feb. 14 at 2 and 7, and Feb. 8 and Feb. 15 at noon and 5. Through Feb. 22.)

NEW CHAMBER BALLET
Miro Magloire, the director and principal choreographer of this small, intellectually engaging chamber company, presents his latest piece, inspired by the music of the pointillist American composer Morton Feldman. (City Center Studio 4, at 130 W. 56th St. 212-868-4444. Feb. 7-8 at 8.)

EVIDENCE, A DANCE COMPANY
A visit by Ronald K. Brown's company replenishes the spirit. In his new piece "Two-Year-Old Gentlemen," the spirit is youthful, that of boys becoming men. (Brown's infant nephew makes a cameo.) Yet, as always in Brown's work, strength is drawn from

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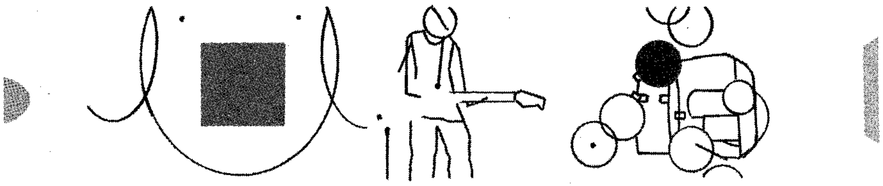


LAURENT CILLUFFO

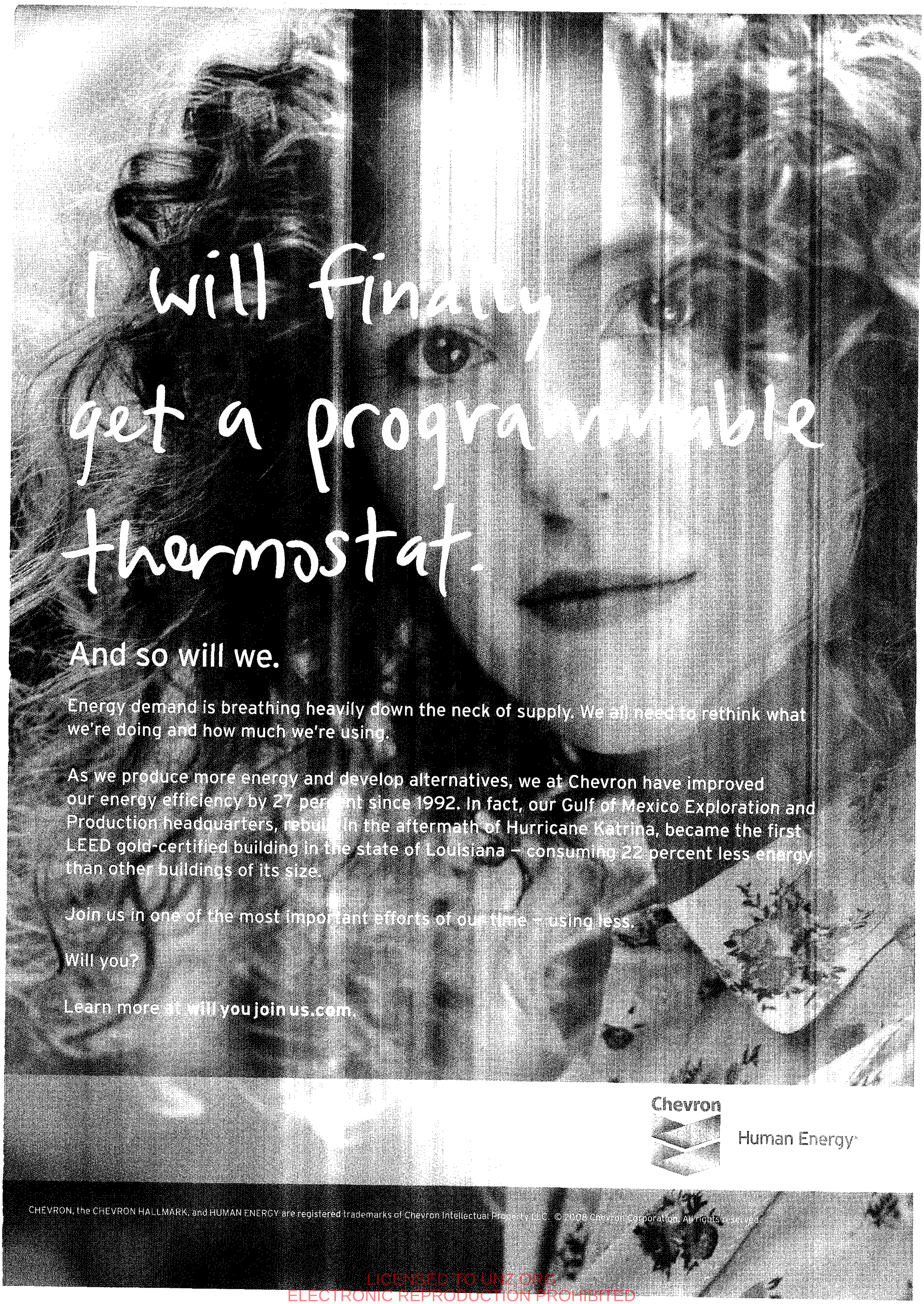
JAZZ NOTES
BACK IN THE FOLD

The ECM record label, the brainchild of the production auteur Manfred Eicher, engenders deep loyalty from its artists—Keith Jarrett, for instance, has been with the company for nearly forty years. And the exit door permits reëntry: a pair of prodigal trumpeters are back in the ECM fold with new albums—Enrico Rava, with "New York Days," and Jon Hassell, with "Last Night the Moon Came Dropping Its Clothes in the Street."

Rava, who is Italian, took a seventeen-year break from ECM before coming back strong in 2004 with a series of albums that displayed his Miles Davis-soaked stylings, as well as the imaginative piano work of Stefano Bollani. On "New York Days," these two players are joined by the drummer Paul Motian, the bassist Larry Grenadier, and the tenor saxophonist Mark Turner, for a gorgeous program of original material and group improvisations. The over-all mood remains lyrical and pensive, suggesting a Miles Davis–Wayne Shorter project devoted mainly to evocative ballads and mid-tempo work. The fact that this admittedly derivative approach pays off when multitudes have failed in similar projects is as much a credit to Eicher and his second-sight ability to pair collaborators as it is to the players themselves.

Hassell, a fascinating horn stylist who uses electronic treatments to alter his trumpet tones, achieves an otherworldly sound that falls somewhere between Miles Davis and a humpback whale. Hassell has never been shy about branching out into pop culture, whether television (he co-wrote the theme for "The Practice") or rock (he contributed the braying brass to "Houses in Motion," on the Talking Heads album "Remain in Light"). But he is most revered as a pioneering avatar of contemporary sound works, comparable to (if not as well known as) Brian Eno. "Last Night the Moon"—Hassell's first record on ECM since "Power Spot," in 1986—still finds him exploring ways of allowing space to dominate his music. Instrumental touches—swaths of electric piano, squiggles of violin—appear like individual brushstrokes, and the whole work functions like an abstract canvas, compelling because of its unpredictability.

—*Steve Futterman*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the elders, the ancestors. Mamadouba Mohammed Camara drums center stage, both guiding and following the dancers' movements, in Brown's glorious distillation of the African diaspora in dance. "Grace," the choreographer's breakthrough work for Alvin Ailey, shares a program with the première, while a second program features "Walking Out the Dark" and the early and revelatory "Exotica." (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Feb. 10-11 at 7:30, Feb. 12-13 at 8, Feb. 14 at 2 and 8, and Feb. 15 at 2 and 7:30.)

Elliott Erwitt's photograph "New York City, 1953," in a show of his works at the Edwynn Houk gallery.

ZOE SCOFIELD AND JUNIPER SHUEY

The Seattle-based team of Scofield the choreographer and Shuey the visual designer makes its New York début with "The Devil You Know Is Better Than the Devil You Don't." Moving her dancers in a tight pack dressed like a chic Polynesian tribe or, more independently, in strips of light, Scofield works off of a prim, balletic core modified by affectless coquetry. Her use of repetition is emphatic, as opposed to the cyclical minimalism of Morgan Henderson's score. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Feb. 12-14 at 7:30.)

DAVID ROUSSÈVE / "SAUDADE"

Roussève indulges his writerly instincts in "Saudade," an evening-length amalgam of storytelling, absurdist humor, Portuguese fado, and eclectic dance that attempts to plumb the Southern African-American experience. (Alexander Kasser, Montclair State University, 1 Normal Ave., Montclair, N.J. 973-655-5112. Feb. 12-13 at 7:30, Feb. 14 at 8, and Feb. 15 at 3.)

JODY OBERFELDER DANCE PROJECTS

The modern dancemaker Jody Oberfelder integrates splashes of theatre and her signature wit with whole-bodied, athletic movement. At Joyce SoHo, her company performs a program that includes her new "Approaching Climax," an exploration of life's peaks and plateaus. (155 Mercer St. 212-352-3101. Feb. 12 at 7:30, Feb. 13-14 at 8, and Feb. 15 at 3.)

"SOUNDCHECK"

In the first of four programs, from the folks who present "Tap City," Christopher Scott offers young virtuosi in love and a d.j., while the older and gentler Katherine Kramer experiments with live Afro-Brazilian music, modern dancers, and some contact improv. The second program pairs a vaudeville turn by class clown Josh Hilberman with nature poetry by the grande dame Brenda Bufalino. (Judson Memorial Church, 55 Washington Sq. S. 800-838-3006. Feb. 12-13 at 8. Through Feb. 20.)

TIFFANY MILLS COMPANY

In "Tomorrow's Legs," a collaboration with Prototype Theatre's writer-director Peter Petralia, Mills draws on the memories of her dancers. They tell stories about a missing dog or a lost brother while attempting to force emotional connections through roughhouse partnering, headlocks, and more tender gestures. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 866-811-4111. Feb. 12-14 at 8:30.)

NEW YORK FLAMENCO FESTIVAL

A beloved tradition in its ninth year, the annual event starts up, on Friday, with the young, in a concert joining the vocalist Arcángel, the pianist Dorantes, and the explosive dancer Rosario Toledo. On Saturday, the svelte Isabel Bayón brings "La Puerta Abierta," a solo show in which she never leaves the stage, not even while changing clothes. Historic *cante* recordings and one of Bach's "Goldberg Variations" give some history and contrast to her interactions with the live musicians, including the guest vocalist Terremoto. (Skirball Center, 566 LaGuardia Pl. 212-545-7536. Feb. 13-14 at 8 and Feb. 15 at 7. Through Feb. 22.)

ASPEN SANTA FE BALLET

This excellent contemporary ballet company specializes in a diverse repertoire, including many works influenced by trends in European dance. At the Joyce, the program includes the well-known "Slingerland Pas de Deux," a radical reconstruction of the ballet vocabulary by the American-born William Forsythe, as well as "Petal," a newer work by a choreographer closely identified with Forsythe, Helen Pickett. Two other pieces are "Chameleon," by the Israeli-born Itzik Galili, whose work is not often performed here, and the futuristic "1st Flash," by Jorma Elo. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Feb. 17 at 7. Through Feb. 22.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA

"Rigoletto," with Aleksandra Kurzak, Giuseppe Filianoti, and George Gagnidze in the leading roles; Riccardo Frizza conducts. (Feb. 4, Feb. 7, and Feb. 12 at 8; Piotr Beczala replaces Filianoti in the third performance.) ♦ Robert Carsen's production of **"Eugene Onegin,"** Tchaikovsky's searing study (via Pushkin) of doomed love amid nineteenth-century Russia's useless upper middle class, is costumed in period garb but set in a big plain box in which mere suggestions of detail—a slender tree, a cascade of flower petals—have enormous emotional resonance. It returns with Karita Mattila as Tatiana, Piotr Beczala as Lenski, and Thomas Hampson in the title role; the renowned Czech conductor Jiri Belohlávek is on the podium. (Feb. 5 and Feb. 9 at 8 and Feb. 14 at 1.) ♦ Cilea's **"Adriana Lecouvreur"**—the most elegant of the old verismo chestnuts—has come back to the Met. The formidable cast includes Maria Guleghina, Olga Borodina, Roberto Frontali, and, as Maurizio, Plácido Domingo—one of the most renowned exponents of the role. On the podium, Marco Armiliato will have the score well in hand. (Feb. 6, Feb. 10, Feb. 13, and Feb. 17 at 8. Marcello Giordani replaces Domingo in the fourth performance.) ♦ Mary Zimmerman's daring 2007 production of **"Lucia di Lammermoor,"** while undeniably theatrical, upset a number of traditionalists who were used to the Met's formerly conservative staging; in this revival, however, the all-star headliners—Anna Netrebko, Rolando Villazón, Mariusz Kwiecien—seem more occupied with glamorous singing than subtle stage-

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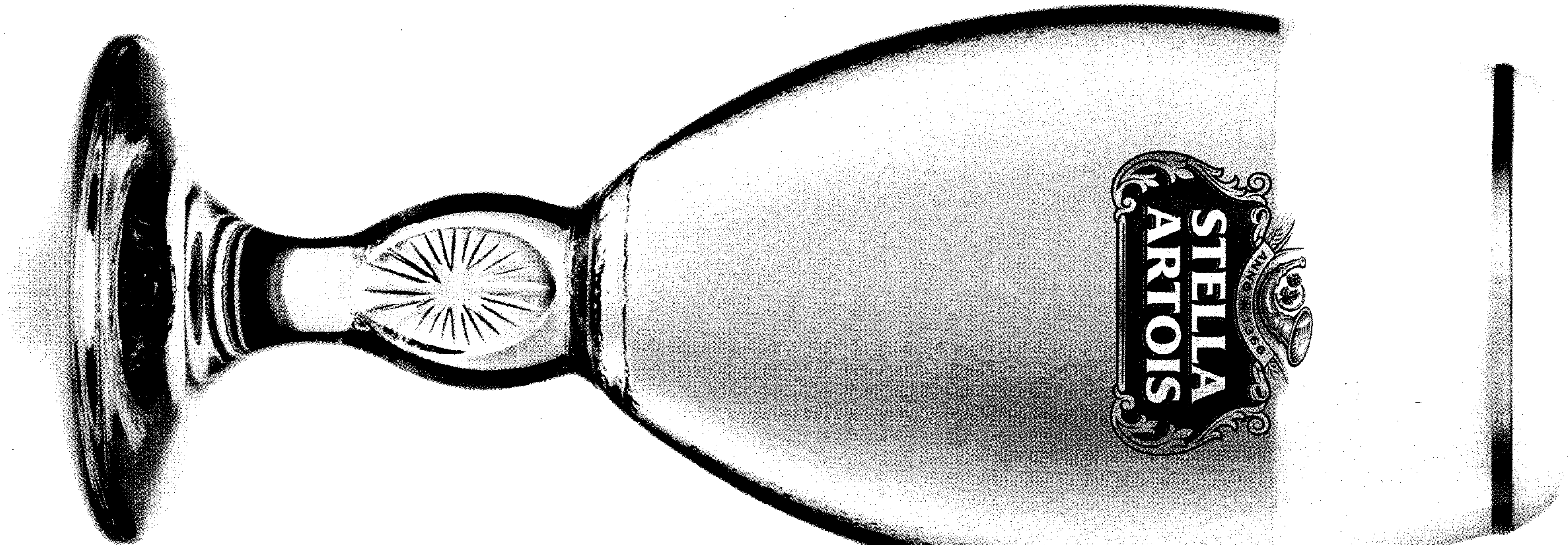

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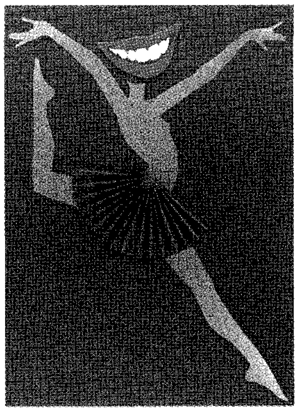
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
ALL SMILES

An epidemic of flirtiness has attacked our ballet companies. The dancers woo us, grin at us, give us saucy looks. "I'm going to do something special," they say. Then they do it. Then they cock an eye at us as if to say, "Wasn't that marvellous?" The situation is worse, of course, in lighter-hearted pieces. When American Ballet Theatre performed Twyla Tharp's "Baker's Dozen" last year, the cast couldn't stop telling us what a fun bunch of people they were. (Craig Salstein, in his solo, practically gave us his phone number.) But this is going on in darker pieces, too. Strangely, the problem has no relation to talent. You'd think that hard sell would come from nervousness, and sometimes it does, but Irina Dvorovenko, the worst offender at A.B.T., doesn't look unconfident. That's not to speak of Ashley Bouder, the allegro champion of New York City Ballet. She can do anything, and she knows it, so why does she have to tell us, every second, to look at her? We *were* looking at her. Why don't the coaches say something?

—*Joan Acocella*



SILJA GÖTZ

craft. Netrebko sounds especially opulent as the delicate, exploited bride of Lammermoor; Marco Armiliato conducts with a confident sense of style. (Feb. 7 at 1. This is the final performance.) ♦ People who have problems with **"La Rondine"** *(is it opera, or operetta?)* are thinking too hard. It's light, limpid, and lovely—as if Puccini had written "State Fair." Its setting, however, is in sophisticated nineteen-twenties Paris, a milieu splendidly brought to life by Angela Gheorghiu (singing "Chi il bel sogno di Doretta"), Lisette Oropesa, Marius Brenciu, and a new addition to the cast, Giuseppe Filianoti. Marco Armiliato conducts with friendly authority, and everyone goes home happy. (Feb. 11 and Feb. 14 at 8.) ♦ A much anticipated new production, by David McVicar, of **"Il Trovatore,"** featuring Sondra Radvanovsky, Dolora Zajick, Marcelo Álvarez, and Dmitri Hvorostovsky; Gianandrea Noseda. (Feb. 16 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

DOWNTOWN MUSIC PRODUCTIONS: "THE CRADLE WILL ROCK"
Marc Blitzstein, a composer attracted by both music theatre and opera (and by the proletariat and the supper set), shot to national attention in 1937 with this gritty, Brecht/Weill-style stage piece, a tale of capitalist machinations in an American steel town. (Orson Welles directed; Tim Robbins made a film about its raucous première.) Mimi Stern-Wolfe's tough little company takes it on in one concert performance at St. Mark's Church. (131 E. 10th St. 212-477-1594. Feb. 8 at 3.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
No contemporary conductor has been as devoted to the cause of Felix Mendelssohn as Kurt Masur, the longtime director of the Leipzig Gewandhaus, a group that the great composer, beginning in 1835, made into one of the world's finest orchestras. Masur returns to his nineteen-nineties posting, the Philharmonic, to conduct a program including the "Ruy Blas" Overture, the Violin Concerto (with his frequent collaborator Anne-Sophie Mutter), and the rarely heard "Die Erste Walpurgisnacht," a cantata after a poem by Goethe (featuring the vocal soloists Christine Knorren, Jorma Silvasti, Albert Dohmen, and Thorsten Grümbel, along with the Westminster Symphonic Choir). (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. Feb. 4-5 at 7:30 and Feb. 6-7 at 8.)

CLEVELAND ORCHESTRA
Franz Welser-Möst conducts the ensemble in three concerts. Feb. 4 at 8: Ligeti's "Atmosphères" (a Cleveland calling card), Wagner's "Wesendonck Lieder" (with Measha Brueggergosman), and Strauss's "Alpine Symphony." ♦ Feb. 6 at 8: Pierre-Laurent Aimard is the guest soloist for George Benjamin's "Duet for Piano and Orchestra"; Shostakovich's "Leningrad" Symphony follows. ♦ Feb. 7 at 8: Brueggergosman returns to join several other vocalists (and the fine Cleveland Orchestra Chorus) in the final concert—Mozart's "Little G Minor" Symphony, Debussy's "Nocturnes," and Janáček's "Glagolitic Mass." (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800.)

BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Carnegie Hall's parade of gold-plated orchestras continues with James Levine's elegant band, which offers Mozart arias (with the soprano Barbara Frittoli), a new work from the Boston modernist Gunther Schuller ("Where the World Ends"), and Brahms's Symphony No. 2 in D Major. (212-247-7800. Feb. 9 at 8.)

"SACRED MUSIC IN A SACRED SPACE"
Kent Tritle leads his superb Choir of the Church of St. Ignatius Loyola out on a limb in "Eternal Light," a concert featuring contemporary—and contemporary-classic—works by Ligeti (the mesmerizing "Lux Aeterna"), Pärt, Penderecki, and Morten Lauridsen, as well as the U.S. première of a piece by Gavin Bryars, "On Photography" (based *on a poem by Pope Leo XIII). (Park Ave. at 84th* St. 212-288-2520. Feb. 11 at 8.)

TAFELMUSIK BAROQUE ORCHESTRA
Jeanne Lamon's internationally renowned ensemble from Toronto celebrates its thirtieth anniversary by making its Carnegie Hall début. A suite from Rameau's *tragédie en musique* "Dardanus" and Handel's complete "Water Music" make for an inviting program. (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. Feb. 13 at 7:30.)

VOX VOCAL ENSEMBLE
Where's George Steel? The peripatetic impresario—the next general manager of New York City Opera—makes a return appearance on the Miller schedule conducting "Songs of Love, Lust, and Lamentation," a concert ranging from music by Crequillon (the Lamentations of Jeremiah) to Howells ("Sweetest of Sweets"). (Church of St. Mary the Virgin, 145 W. 46th St. 212-854-7799. Feb. 14 at 8.)

RECITALS

PIERRE-LAURENT AIMARD
The brilliant French pianist continues the Carter birthday concerts with a recital mixing several of the New York composer's solo works (including the titanic "Night Fantasies") with selections from Bach's "Art of Fugue." (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. Feb. 5 at 7:30.)

"THE BEST MUSIC OF 1939"
Symphony Space, celebrating the arts from another time of troubles in America, begins the month with a piano recital by Sara Laimon, who performs two solo masterworks: Copland's Piano Sonata and Ives's "Concord" Sonata. (Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Feb. 5 at 7:30. For full schedule, see www.symphonyspace.org.)

MUSIC AT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Prague's Talich Quartet, an avatar of authentic Czech string playing for more than three decades, leads the roster at the museum in the next two weeks, performing Beethoven's String Quartets in C Minor (Op. 18, No. 4) and B-Flat Major (Op. 130). (Feb. 5 at 8. 212-570-3949. For full schedule, see www.metmuseum.org.)

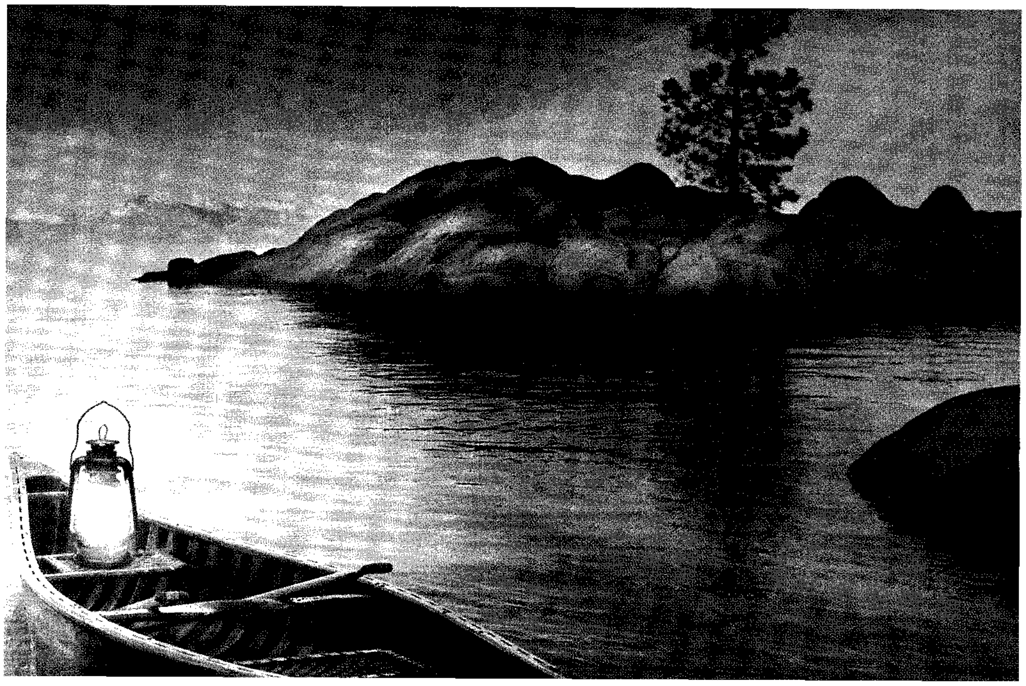
"GIL SHAHAM AND FRIENDS"
The violinist and his talented artistic family play Brahms at Zankel Hall. Feb. 6 at 7:30: The Piano Trio No. 3, the Violin Sonata No. 2, and the String Quintet in F Major. ♦ Feb. 9 at 7:30: The maybe-Brahms Piano Trio in A Major, Opus Posthumous, and the String Quintet in G Major. (212-247-7800.)

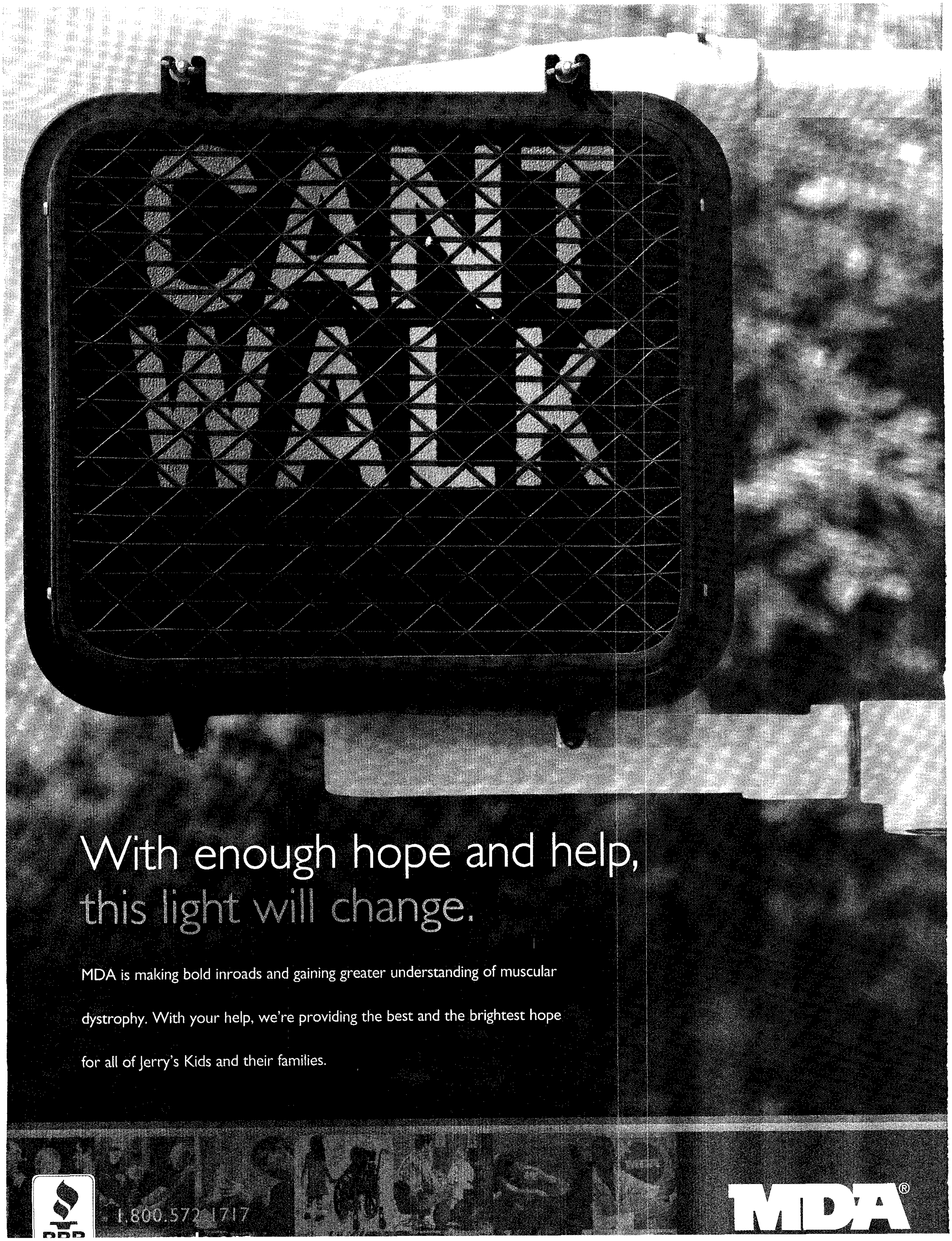
MILLER THEATRE: "COMPOSER PORTRAITS"
Feb. 6 at 8: The excellent Argento Chamber Ensemble goes the extra mile, performing the U.S. première of "In Vain," the distinguished Austrian experimentalist composer Georg Friedrich Haas's seventy-five-minute virtuoso essay—from memory, and in the dark. ♦ Feb. 12 at 8: Jefferson Friedman, a more "accessible" young American, gets his time in the sun with a concert offering both chamber music (with the superb Chiara String Quartet) and some adventures in rock. (Broadway at 116th St. 212-854-7799.)

EMERSON STRING QUARTET
The magisterial foursome comes to Carnegie Hall with the violist Paul Neubauer and the cellist Lynn Harrell, offering quartets by Ravel and Prokofiev along with Tchaikovsky's extravagant sextet, "Souvenir de Florence." (212-247-7800. Feb. 8 at 2.)

THE MOVADO HOUR
A brilliant pairing: the young American violinist Jennifer Koh plays solo works by Carter, Zorn, and Ornette Coleman, interspersed with some extraordinarily rare performances of several of Haydn's Baryton Trios by the Esterházy Machine (which includes the admired cellist Myron Lutzke). (Baryshnikov Arts Center, 450 W. 37th St. Feb. 9 at 7. To reserve free tickets, which are required, call 212-279-4200.)

NEW YORK FESTIVAL OF SONG
"Voices of the Jewish Diaspora" features an eclectic assemblage of songs by such composers as Bernstein, Mahler, Shostakovich, Ravel ("Kaddisch"), and Irving Berlin; Steven Blier and Michael Barrett accompany Dina Kuznetsova, Rinat Shaham, and Steven Goldstein. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. Feb. 10 and Feb. 12 at 8.)

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ANNE SOFIE VON OTTER
The commanding Swedish mezzo-soprano appears with her devoted accompanist Bengt Forsberg and the jazz pianist Brad Mehldau in an eclectic recital featuring songs by Sibelius and Schumann as well as the world première of Mehldau's "Love Songs." (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Feb. 11 at 8.)

STEPHEN HOUGH
Music by Bach, Fauré, Chopin (including the Sonata in B Minor), and Copland (the Piano Variations), courtesy of the supremely elegant British pianist. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Feb. 12 at 8.)

MOVIES
OPENING

CONFESSIONS OF A SHOPAHOLIC
P. J. Hogan directed this adaptation of Sophie Kinsella's novels, about a New York journalist (Isla Fisher) who shops herself into debt. Co-starring Hugh Dancy, Joan Cusack, and John Goodman. Opening Feb. 13. (In wide release.)

CORALINE
An animated adaptation of Neil Gaiman's novel, directed by Henry Selick, about a girl who discovers an alternate version of her life. With the voices of Dakota Fanning and Teri Hatcher. Opening Feb. 6. (In wide release.)

DANCE FLICK
A comedy spoof, directed by Damien Wayans, about a young white woman (Shoshana Bush) who pursues a career as a hip-hop dancer. Co-starring Marlon Wayans and Shawn Wayans. Opening Feb. 6. (In wide release.)

FANBOYS
In this comedy, set in 1998, a group of "Star Wars" fans go to Skywalker Ranch in the hope of seeing "The Phantom Menace" before its release. Directed by Kyle Newman; starring Sam Huntington, Chris Marquette, Dan Fogler, and Jay Baruchel. Opening Feb. 6. (In wide release.)

FREE STYLE
A drama, directed by William Dear, about a young man (Corbin Bleu) who wants to become a motocross racer. Opening Feb. 6. (In wide release.)

GOMORRAH
Matteo Garrone directed this drama, based on Roberto Saviano's nonfiction book, about the infiltration of the Camorra, the Neapolitan Mafia, into daily life in Italy. In Italian. Opening Feb. 13. (IFC Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

HE'S JUST NOT THAT INTO YOU
Ken Kwapis directed this set of interconnected love stories, set in Baltimore. Starring Drew Barrymore, Jennifer Connelly, Jennifer Aniston, Scarlett Johansson, Ben Affleck, and Kris Kristofferson. Opening Feb. 6. (In wide release.)

THE INTERNATIONAL
A thriller, directed by Tom Tykwer, starring Clive Owen and Naomi Watts, about an Interpol agent and a New York D.A. who follow the sources of a bank's illicit funds throughout the world. Opening Feb. 13. (In wide release.)

MEMORIAL DAY
Josh Fox directed this drama, about teen-agers who videotape their escapades at a beach resort. Opening Feb. 4. (IFC Center.)

OUR CITY DREAMS
A documentary, directed by Chiara Clemente, about five women artists and their devotion to New York. Opening Feb. 4.

THE PINK PANTHER 2
A comedy sequel, starring Steve Martin, as Inspector Clouseau, and Jean Reno, as his sidekick; directed by Harald Zwart.

PUSH
In this science-fiction thriller, a group of Americans exert their telekinetic powers overseas. Directed by Paul McGuigan; starring Dakota Fanning and Djimon Hounsou. Opening Feb. 6. (In wide release.)

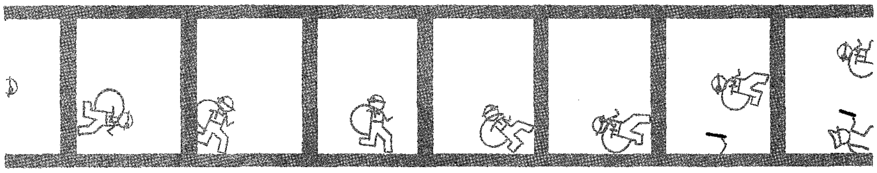
TWO LOVERS
James Gray directed this romantic drama, set in Brooklyn, about a troubled man (Joaquin Phoenix) who plans to marry one woman (Vinessa Shaw) but falls in love with another (Gwyneth Paltrow). Opening Feb. 13. (In wide release.)

NOW PLAYING

CALIFORNIA DREAMIN'
The first and only full-length feature from the young Romanian director Cristian Nemescu. He died in 2006, while still editing the film, but, as a legacy, this feels alive with curiosity and sombre wit. Armand Assante plays a U.S. Marine captain (one of the more unlikely casting decisions of recent times), whose job is to transport military equipment across rural Romania, on the way to the Serbian border. (The action takes place during the Kosovo conflict in 1999.) The train is halted in a quiet village, on the orders of the grizzled, Machiavellian stationmaster (Razvan Vasilescu), and the marines are unleashed to mingle with the populace—including the effusive mayor and a troupe of bored young women, who welcome the interruption. Chief among them is the stationmaster's daughter (Maria Dinulescu), whose appetite for the world is as potent as her father's sour contempt for it, and who lunges at the captain's second-in-command (Jamie Elman). The movie is restless to behold, forever seeking out those points of contact where the two nations collide and spark and finding rueful comedy in the trading of desires; Nemescu was plainly wise beyond his years, few though they were. In Romanian and English.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 2/2/09.) (IFC Center.)

CHERRY BLOSSOMS
Doris Dörrie's poky, odd, but poetic film about a middle-aged widower's progress to an emotionally satisfying state of mourning. It turns out that Trudi (Hannelore Elsner), a Bavarian hausfrau, was fascinated, as a young woman, with Butoh, an amalgam of European and Japanese avant-garde dance techniques. When she dies, her grief-stricken husband, Rudi (Elmar Wepper), goes to Tokyo to visit one of their children and falls in with a teen-age girl who performs Butoh along a canal. She teaches him how to mourn. The movie's conceits are just barely endurable, but the sharpness of Dörrie's eye—for Tokyo's electric night, for Mt. Fuji's iconographic landscapes, for cherry blossoms—carries emotion along even when story logic fails. In German, English, and Japanese.—*David Denby* (1/26/09) (Sunshine Cinema.)

THE CLASS
Extraordinary. François Bégaudeau, a teacher in a Paris public school in the Twentieth Arrondissement, published a novel in 2006 chronicling a year in his classroom. Along with the director Laurent Cantet and the writer Robin Campillo, he then condensed and reshaped the material into a two-hour drama centering on the teacher (Bégaudeau, playing himself) and a small number of students (all played by actual students, though not the same ones he wrote about). Bégaudeau, who is in his thirties, is handsome, lean, and quick, with a strong voice; his slouching or rowdy fourteen-year-olds are mostly of African or Caribbean descent—still outsiders in France, and rightfully touchy about it. Some of them are resistant to education, which disrupts the pleasures of adolescence, and Bégaudeau aggressively comes after them, challenging, correcting, teasing, criticizing. The students are alive to him and come back hard, questioning French notions of discipline and manners. In all, "The Class" is a prime document of French post-colonial blues, though its relevance to American urban education could not be any greater if it had been shot in the Bronx or Trenton or South Los Angeles. In French.—*D.D.*



LAURENT CILLUFFO

DVD NOTES
TALKING PICTURES

Love may be blind, but Douglas Sirk, one of Hollywood's greatest directors of love stories, observed his métier with revelatory clarity. A 1980 feature-length interview with Sirk, "From UFA to Hollywood," a splendid extra on a two-disk set of his "Magnificent Obsession" (Criterion), from 1954—the film that made Rock Hudson a star and brought new life to the soppy genre of "women's pictures"—distills the director's artistry and offers a lesson in moviemaking.

UFA, the leading German movie studio of the prewar years, is where Sirk (born Claus Detlev Sierck) made films before leaving the country, in 1937. The interview is not a survey of Sirk's career but rather an in-depth exploration of several key experiences, beginning with his creation of a star—Zarah Leander, a Swedish singer who had little acting talent but impressed him with "the force of her personality." He describes their work together with the sort of psychologically acute visual sensibility that marks his movies: "My camera explored the whole strange Nordic landscape of her face. It was as if covered by a blanket of ice."

At the time of the interview, the aged Sirk (whose precise birth date is uncertain) was still sharp; speaking in German, he enlivens incidents from five decades earlier with a wealth of precise and piquant detail and describes scenes from his movies with a three-dimensional fullness that makes them seem to unspool before your eyes.

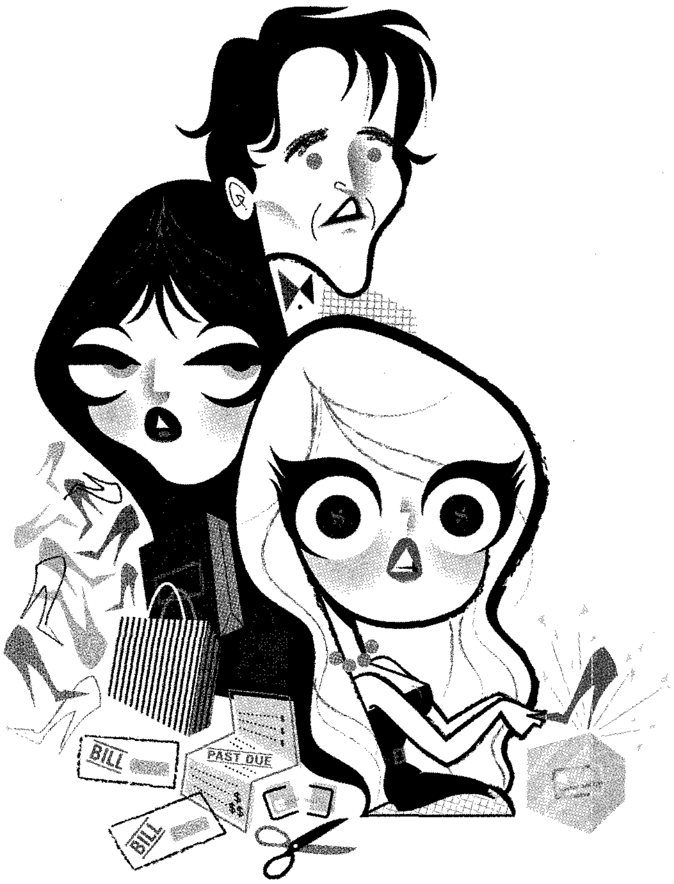
Sirk had always admired one Hollywood genre—melodrama, "these strange stories in which the bizarre, the impossible, the accidental, and the odd were boldly embraced to expose a force that lay underneath." He made his name with this genre, in films such as "Magnificent Obsession," about a playboy who becomes a brain surgeon in order to win the love of a woman who was widowed and blinded because of his recklessness. But in the interview Sirk reveals the political basis for these movies, which he calls "a whole series of investigations into the American middle class, because I remembered the middle class from the Hitler era as the soil in which dictatorships take root." He also expounds the extraordinarily modern aesthetic philosophy behind his glossy romances—"The surface isn't really the surface, but rather a manifestation of the depths"—and delivers a directorial credo: "Style is the most profound expression of personality." There's much, much more in the interview to fix a viewer's attention; the coherence and profundity of his deceptively casual reflections match those of his films.

—*Richard Brody*

THE CURIOUS CASE OF BENJAMIN BUTTON
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

FROST/NIXON
In its transfer from stage to film, Peter Morgan's account of David Frost's lengthy set of interviews with Richard Nixon in 1977, three years after he resigned the Presidency, has taken on an aura of momentousness unwarranted by the event itself. Frank Langella's performance provides considerable insights into Nixon's intelligence, caginess, and fraudulent sentimentality, and Michael Sheen makes Frost into a toothy, bright, shallow but smart showman-journalist. The interviews themselves, always absorbing, build to Nixon's climactic admission that he let the country down during the Watergate crisis. The media whirl of negotiation, advisers, preparation, and so on is engaging enough, but the episode itself changed nothing. It was a journalistic coup, not a historical milestone, and the filmmakers don't seem to realize that. Directed by Ron Howard.—*D.D.* (12/8/08) (In wide release.)

MILK
Gus Van Sant's vibrantly entertaining bio-pic re-creates, without starchiness, the San Francisco life of the gay activist and politician Harvey Milk (Sean Penn), who was assassinated in 1978, along with Mayor George Moscone, by a fellow-politician, the family-values conservative Dan White (Josh Brolin). The righteous march of events is warmed by the banter, the casual sex, and the candor of the gay milieu in the giddy seventies, the period just before AIDS, when life was free and easy. Much of the time, Penn keeps his voice down, but the fervor and humor are there in the most offhanded moments. Without ostentation, he creates a new body, a new temperament: he loosens his neck and shoulders and swivels his head; his smile is enormous and all-embracing; he holds an elbow out and pumps a forearm up and down like a semaphore as Harvey speaks in public. Brolin, a slab of hair lying low across his forehead, gives White a brick-headed, baffled manner, a tormented neediness. In the filmmakers' interpretation, there's a suggestion that White suffered from murderously repressed homosexuality.—*D.D.* (12/1/08) (In wide release.)



"Confessions of a Shopaholic," starring Isla Fisher, opens Feb. 13.

KIRSTEN ULVE

THE READER
The British director Stephen Daldry made a splash with "The Hours," and this new film is no less worthy, ambitious, and exasperating. The screenwriter, once again, is David Hare, who fillets the best-selling novel by Bernhard Schlink. For all Hare's expertise, however, we are stuck with the unsavory pretensions of the original tale. Kate Winslet plays Hanna, who, thirteen years after the Second World War, works on the trams in Neustadt, West Germany, and has occasional sex with a local teen-age boy named Michael (David Kross). Their first time, though lingeringly shot, has all the finesse of cheap porno; where else does a woman tell a lusty youth to shed his clothes and take a bath because he has dirt on his face? In the movie's second half, we see Hanna being tried and imprisoned for her wartime deeds; there is a shocking revelation, which comes as no surprise; and the middle-aged Michael (Ralph Fiennes) turns up to help his onetime love. Daldry takes things painfully slowly, not helped by a sappy score, and we are encouraged to muse upon the cultural shortcomings, or even improvements, in the life of an aging member of the S.S. This is not an issue that most of us feel the need to worry about. With a strong performance, late in the day, from Lena Olin.—*A.L.* (12/15/08) (In wide release.)

SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

TAKEN
Liam Neeson plays a divorced father and former C.I.A. employee, who lives in Los Angeles to be near his immensely annoying grown daughter (Maggie Grace). When she is kidnapped on a trip to Paris, he tracks her down, taking the opportunity to combine his two favorite cultural interests: tender paternal love and indiscriminate homicide. First he slaughters the Albanians who stole her, before moving on to the Arabs who want to buy her, and you feel quite sure that he would, if required, slash and thump his way through the rest of the alphabet. For those with a taste for political allegory, there is something to ponder here, although the director, Pierre Morel, together with his producer (and co-writer) Luc Besson, takes things at such a clip that little room is left for contemplation. The result is unrelenting, improbable, and humorless; Neeson, as domineering as ever, shades his feats of aggression with a solemn gravity that they scarcely deserve, and anyone raised on "An American in Paris" will weep to think how far we have travelled from Gene Kelly. That was a fantasy of international ease; this is a bad dream of revenge. With Famke Janssen.—*A.L.* (2/2/09) (In wide release.)

THE TALL TARGET
The exotic genre alone is a joy—a historical film noir, set in 1861, largely aboard a train, and centered on a plot against President-elect Lincoln's life—and the director Anthony Mann fleshes it out with vigorous and subtle attention to its disparate elements, political, psychological, and brutal. The snappy, smart Dick Powell stars as the New York police sergeant John Kennedy (just a coincidence—the movie is from 1951), who, getting wind of a plot against Lincoln in Baltimore, defies his dismissive department—run by Tammany Democrats—to board a southbound train in the hope of thwarting it; there, he finds himself the target of a hired killer. The action unfolds against a backdrop of America's bitter divisions on the eve of civil war, in the person of the voluble passengers, including a Confederate officer, his sister, and their slave (played with heartbreaking grace by the young Ruby Dee), a Boston woman who's an abolitionist writer, a New York businessman whose interests are threatened by Lincoln's hard line, and a sordid gallery of political conspirators whose motives range from the mercenary to the passionate. The unctuous Adolphe Menjou, a real-life rightist, does a slimy turn as a fellow police officer along for the ride, Marshall Thompson shines as the ardent face of youthful fanaticism, and the soon to be blacklisted Will Geer provides comic relief as an exasperated motorman, but it's Mann who keeps the engine rolling at top speed. One rapid, silent shot of sudden nocturnal menace is an all-time anthology piece.—*Richard Brody* (Film Forum; Feb. 12.)

VALLEY OF THE DOLLS
The Body (Sharon Tate), the Talent (Patty Duke), and the High-Class Looker (Barbara Parkins) swallow their troubles with prescription drugs in this celluloid pharmacy of camp, from 1967. Squeezing Jacqueline Susann's sprawling Broadway-and-Hollywood roman à clef into two hours, the filmmakers come up with a risible compendium of with-it styles and a climax of some sort every other minute. As a success-starved singer, Duke catapults from ingénue to diva before losing it all to booze and pills; her comeback provides the movie's histrionic high points. The swoony treatment of Parkins, as a Radcliffe graduate turned TV pitchwoman, has its own inadvertent humor. Tate, playing a girl whose success depends on her physique (she becomes a soft-core actress), displays a lost, Kim Novak-like quality that would have been touching in less ludicrous circumstances. Susann, who is said to have had a hand in the script, appears briefly as a reporter. Directed by Mark Robson.—*Michael Sragow* (Rubin Museum of Art; Feb. 6.)

WALTZ WITH BASHIR
A documentary cartoon may sound like an oxymoron (is it not the duty of animation to elasticize reality?), and Ari Folman's film is indeed impossible to classify. Buried within it is the massacre at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps of West Beirut, in 1982, but much of the movie is composed of dreams and distant recollections, as Folman—who was serving in the Israel Defense Forces at the time—questions his former colleagues and slowly feels his way toward the horror. There are passages of unexpected lyricism, including the Fellini-like vision of a giant waterborne nude, as well as a very funny pastiche of no-budget German pornography, but the harsh editing and the gloomy hues leave you in no doubt as to the sombre purpose of Folman's quest. Whether that justifies the last-minute switch of direction, in which he reverts to actual news footage of the slaughter, is open to debate; the head-on vigor of his animation is already graphic enough. In Hebrew, German, and English.—*A.L.* (1/5/09) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

THE WRESTLER
A straightforward tale, given tremendous extra punch by its leading man. Mickey Rourke, whose career was long ago laid to rest, rises again to play Randy (the Ram) Robinson, a wrestler whose own career has tumbled from a high of twenty years before. No one else, it seems fair to say, could have played the part; for one thing, no one but Rourke combines a gently spoken sweetness with so glazed and inflated a physique, together with a willingness to be treated by his peers like a veal chop.

Stories of HAWAIʻI

IN DREAMS, INSPIRATION COMES to master hula teacher Kapu Kinimaka-Alquiza. So powerful is the message, it wakes her in the night. She rouses her husband, a graphic designer who has become an unwitting accomplice in these ventures, then pulls shorts and a jacket over pajamas. Together they drive through the dark to an ancient hula platform on the north shore of the Island near Keʻe Beach, two hours from their home in Hanapēpē. As he dozes in the truck, she sits in meditation where, legend has it, Hawaiian fire goddess, Pele, dallied with her lover, Lohiʻau.

"The melody doesn't come; it's more the history of the song that comes," she says. "Dawn…the winds…the sound of the sea…I almost always call out for spiritual guidance for nature to be part of my creativity."

At daybreak, when the couple finally make their way back home, hours have passed and Kapu is now scribbling ideas for new material in a notebook. She has danced slowly in the darkness, or sat with eyes closed, as stories of ancestors or old Hawaiian gods drift through her consciousness.

"Hula started way back in history because the Hawaiians could not write anything down," she says. "So they had to save their history through hula. It's what they wanted to leave for the next generation."

PLUMERIA PHOTO ©FLOWERPHOTOS/ALAMY. ALL OTHER IMAGES: ©TOR JOHNSON/2009 HAWAII VISITORS AND CONVENTION BUREAU

Nature-inspired Hula.

Hula hālau **(schools) help maintain and perpetuate Hawaiʻi's cultural identity, and public performances are one way to share this rich heritage with visitors. For example, experienced dancers from Kapu's group perform weekly in Poʻipū, Kauaʻi.**

Kinimaka-Alquiza has been steeped in hula since she was a child of five attending lessons with seven sisters, but struggling against the imposed discipline. "You know what inspired me to stay with it? Auntie Lovey bribed me. She said if I stayed and danced hula, she would give me five dollars. At that age it was hard to get a cheeseburger at Dairy Queen, so I went for it!"

Now, as a *kumu hula*—leader of a dance school or *hālau*—she quickly spots the little one from among the *keiki* (children) who will go on to become a teacher. She singles out the *kolohe*—a rascal, just like her.

Only when she stopped hula for a time, to begin raising a family, did she truly understand its deep meaning. "It was my *kumu* who really taught me what hula was about—enjoyment, learning, strictness, culture. All of that was embedded in me. And when my daughter was born, I wanted to give her the same experience."

Before becoming a teacher, she asked permission of her *kumu*, the late Uncle Joe Kahaulelio. Knowing how often she had tried his patience, she approached him nervously. Cradling her face in his hands, he looked into her eyes.

"Out of all your sisters, I knew you would be the teacher," he told her. "What took you so long?"

– **Beverly Creamer**

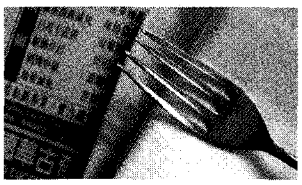
VISIT **GOHAWAII.COM/STORIES** TO SEE AND HEAR MORE ABOUT THE HERITAGE OF HULA.

The scenes in the ring, in which Randy, despite a heart attack, struggles to prolong the dregs of his appeal, are often hard to take; even more agonizing are his attempts to forge enduring bonds with his estranged daughter (Evan Rachel Wood) and a tired stripper (Marisa Tomei). The film has a grainy, bloodied sadness that slips at times into the sentimental, but the director, Darren Aronofsky, knows precisely where the heart of the story beats, and that confidence is a refreshing change after the drippy meanderings of his previous film, "The Fountain." There is nothing less mystical, or more moving, than to watch the Ram reduced to serving at a deli counter: a good man at the end of the line.—*A.L.* (12/15/08) (In wide release.)

Also Playing

BRIDE WARS: In wide release. **HOTEL FOR DOGS:** In wide release. **INKHEART:** In wide release. **PAUL BLART: MALL COP:** In wide release.

TABLES FOR TWO
GRAFFITI



Graffiti, 224 E. 10th St. (212-677-0695)—Jehangir Mehta, the chef behind this eclectic tapas spot, is a man of diminutive proportions. His dishes, likewise, are small, as are the kitchen (two hot plates, two steam cookers) and the restaurant itself, which suggests the experience of dining in a well-appointed subway car. Claustrophobes should be warned that the single rest room is only slightly wider than a pair of broad shoulders, and you'll have to jostle the cooks to reach it. Recently, a young woman squeezing past her seatmates was overheard muttering the obvious: "This is a restaurant for skinny people."

Mehta's less-is-more approach (when not manning the hot plates, the chef hosts, waits, and buses the four communal tables) feels au courant, given the economic climate, but the restaurant's aesthetic—and its name—conjures a scrappier, pre-Giuliani East Village. The chairs don't match, foreign newspapers serve as placemats, and notes scrawled on masking tape adorn the walls. The food, on the other hand, is decidedly gentrified. Mehta, formerly of Jean Georges, cooks mostly according to Ayurvedic principles of balance, and each of his dishes is delivered with a brief soliloquy justifying its components. A delectable chestnut-bread starter, you are informed, has figs for sweetness, olives for saltiness, and goat cheese for creaminess; the chestnuts add "something earthy." Pork dumplings come with tomato-chili sauce (sweet/spicy), grapefruit confit (sour), and fried chickpea noodles (crunchy). The menu's standout is the Graffiti burger—two tiny, kebab-spiced patties that ought to rank among the city's best, in spite of their size; chipotle mayo perfectly complements the fragrant beef and cold, crisp romaine. By contrast, the only discernible balance in a plate of chili shrimp is that between rubbery and scalding, and a dessert of warm truffled strawberries topped with black-pepper ice cream seems more concerned with decadence than with flavor.

At the end of the meal, checks arrive inside envelopes graffitied by prior guests, palimpsests of dinners past. "I'm looking for a thoroughbred," reads one message. "Must be: fast, appreciate poetry, sensitive, susceptible to fits of art appreciation, willing to move to Canada, can't make me cook meat products." Such retro bohemianism fades on the flip side: "Tristate Auto Mall has good deals on the Lexus ES350." In the harsh light of recession, it might be the most passé note of the evening. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays for dinner. Dishes $7-$15.)

—*Lila Byock*

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—In première. Feb. 6-15 at 6:30: "Lithuania and the Collapse of the USSR" (2008, Jonas Mekas). ♦ Feb. 11-13 and Feb. 16-17 at 7 and 9 and Feb. 14-15 at 5, 7, and 9: "Great Speeches from a Dying World" (2007, Linas Phillips). ♦ "Essential Cinema." Feb. 5 at 7:30: "Ivan the Terrible," parts 1 and 2 (1942-46; in Russian, no subtitles). ♦ Feb. 7 at 4:30: Short-film program, including "Un Chant d'Amour" (1950, Jean Genet; silent). ♦ Feb. 14 at 4:30: "Une Simple Histoire" (1958, Marcel Hanoun; in French, no subtitles). ♦ Feb. 15 at 4:30: "Arsenal" (1928-29, Alexandr Dovzhenko; silent). ♦ Films by Robert Downey, Sr. Feb. 6 at 7:30 and Feb. 7 at 9:15: "Chafed Elbows" (1966). ♦ Feb. 6 at 9 and Feb. 8 at 7:30: "No More Excuses" (1968). ♦ Feb. 7 at 6 and Feb. 8 at 8:45: "Babo 73" (1964). ♦ Feb. 7 at 7:30 and Feb. 8 at 6: "Moment to Moment" (1975).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—The films of Matteo Garrone. All films are in Italian. Feb. 12 at 7: "Gomorrah" (2008). ♦ Feb. 13 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "First Love" (2004). ♦ Feb. 14 at 3: "Roman Summer" (2000). ♦ Feb. 15 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "The Embalmer" (2002). ♦ Feb. 16 at 6:30 and 9:30: "Guests" (1998) and "Oreste Pipolo, Wedding Photographer" (1998). ♦ February 17 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Middle Land" (1996).

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. Feb. 4-5 at 1:10, 3:20, 5:30, 7:40, and 9:50: "The Panic in Needle Park" (1971, Jerry Schatzberg). ♦ Through March 5: "Breadlines and Champagne," Depression-era movies. Feb. 6 at 1, 3:15, 5:30, 7:45, and 10: "I'm No Angel" (1933, Wesley Ruggles) and short films. ♦ Feb. 7-8 at 1, 4:05, 7:10, and 10:15 and Feb. 9 at 1 and 4:05: "Man's Castle" (1933, Frank Borzage) and "The Three Little Pigs" (1933, Walt Disney). ♦ Feb. 7-8 at 2:35, 5:40, and 8:45 and Feb. 9 at 2:35: "American Madness" (1932, Frank Capra). ♦ Feb. 9 at 6 and 9: "Stand Up and Cheer" (1934, Hamilton MacFadden). ♦ Feb. 9 at 7:30: "Our Daily Bread" (1934, King Vidor). ♦ Feb. 10 at 1, 4:35, and 8:10: "Employees' Entrance" (1933, Roy Del Ruth). ♦ Feb. 10 at 2:35, 6:10, and 9:45: "Skyscraper Souls" (1932, Edgar Selwyn). ♦ Feb. 11 at 1, 4:25, and 7:50: "Three-Cornered Moon" (1933, Elliott Nugent). ♦ Feb. 11 at 2:40, 6:05, and 9:30: "Platinum Blonde" (1931, Frank Capra). ♦ Feb. 12 at 1, 4:35, and 8:05: "Young Mr. Lincoln" (1939, John Ford). ♦ Feb. 12 at 3, 6:30, and 10: "The Tall Target" (†). ♦ Feb. 13 at 1:30, 4:40, and 7:50: "Heroes for Sale" (1933, William Wellman). ♦ Feb. 13 at 3:15, 6:25, and 9:35: "Wild Boys of the Road" (1933, Wellman). ♦ Feb. 14 at 1, 4:35, and 8:20: "My Man Godfrey" (1936, Gregory La Cava). ♦ Feb. 14 at 2:50, 6:25, and 10:10: "Easy Living" (1937, Mitchell Leisen). ♦ Feb. 15 at 1, 4:05, 7:10, and 10:15: "Blessed Event" (1932, Del Ruth). ♦ Feb. 15 at 2:35, 5:40, and 8:45: "Baby Face" (1933, Alfred E. Green). ♦ Feb. 16 at 1, 4:20, and 7:40: "Gabriel Over the White House" (1933, La Cava). ♦ Feb. 16 at 2:40, 6, and 9:30: "Washington Merry-Go-Round" (1932, James Cruze). ♦ Feb. 17 at 1, 4:15, and 7:30: "Hold Your Man" (1933, Sam Wood). ♦ Feb. 17 at 2:45, 6, and 9:30: "Night Nurse" (1931, Wellman).

FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (212-875-5610)—"Faded Glory: Oscar Micheaux and Black Pre-War Cinema." Feb. 6 at 7 and Feb. 8 at 8:15: The Blood of Jesus (1941, Spencer Williams). ♦ Feb. 6 at 9:30 and Feb. 10 at 4: "God's Step Children" (1938, Micheaux). ♦ Feb. 7 at 6 and Feb. 8 at 1:30: "Birthright" (1939, Micheaux) and "Happy Though Married" (1919, Fred Niblo; silent). ♦ Feb. 7 at 8: "Body and Soul" (1925, Micheaux). ♦ Feb. 8 at 3:20 and Feb. 11 at 1: "Dirtie Gertie from Harlem USA" (1946, Williams). ♦ Feb. 8 at 6:45 and Feb. 10 at 2:30: "Keane" (2002, Lodge Kerrigan). ♦ Feb. 2 at 8:45 and Feb. 10 at 2:30: "Moon Over Harlem" (1939, Edgar G. Ulmer). ♦ Feb. 10 at 6:15: "Veiled Aristocrats" (1932, Micheaux) and "Ten Minutes to Live" (1932, Micheaux). ♦ Feb. 10 at 8:30 and Feb. 11 at 2:45: "The Girl in Room 20" (1946, Williams) and "Yamekraw" (1930, Murray Roth). ♦ Feb. 11 at 4:20 and 8:15: "Miracle in Harlem" (1948, Jack Kemp). ♦ Feb. 11 at 6:15: "The Scar of Shame" (1927, Frank Peregini; silent). ♦ Feb. 14 at 1: "The Symbol of the Unconquered" (1920, Micheaux; silent). ♦ Feb. 14 at 2:30: "Swing!" (1938, Micheaux). ♦ Feb. 14 at 4:45: "Go Down Death" (1944, Williams). ♦ Feb. 14 at 6:45: "Murder in Harlem" (1935, Micheaux). ♦ Feb. 14 at 8:45: "The Exile" (1931, Micheaux and Leonard Harper). ♦ Feb. 15 at 1:30: "In the Shadow of Hollywood" (2007, Brad Osborne) and "Black and Tan" (1929, Dudley Murphy). ♦ Feb. 15 at 3:15: "Eleven P.M." (1928, Richard Maurice; silent).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE

Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Through March 2: The films of Jacques Doillon. Feb. 10 at 12:30, 4, and 7:30: "The Little Gangster" (1990; in French). ♦ Feb. 17 at 12:30, 4, and 7:30: "Ponette" (1996; in French).

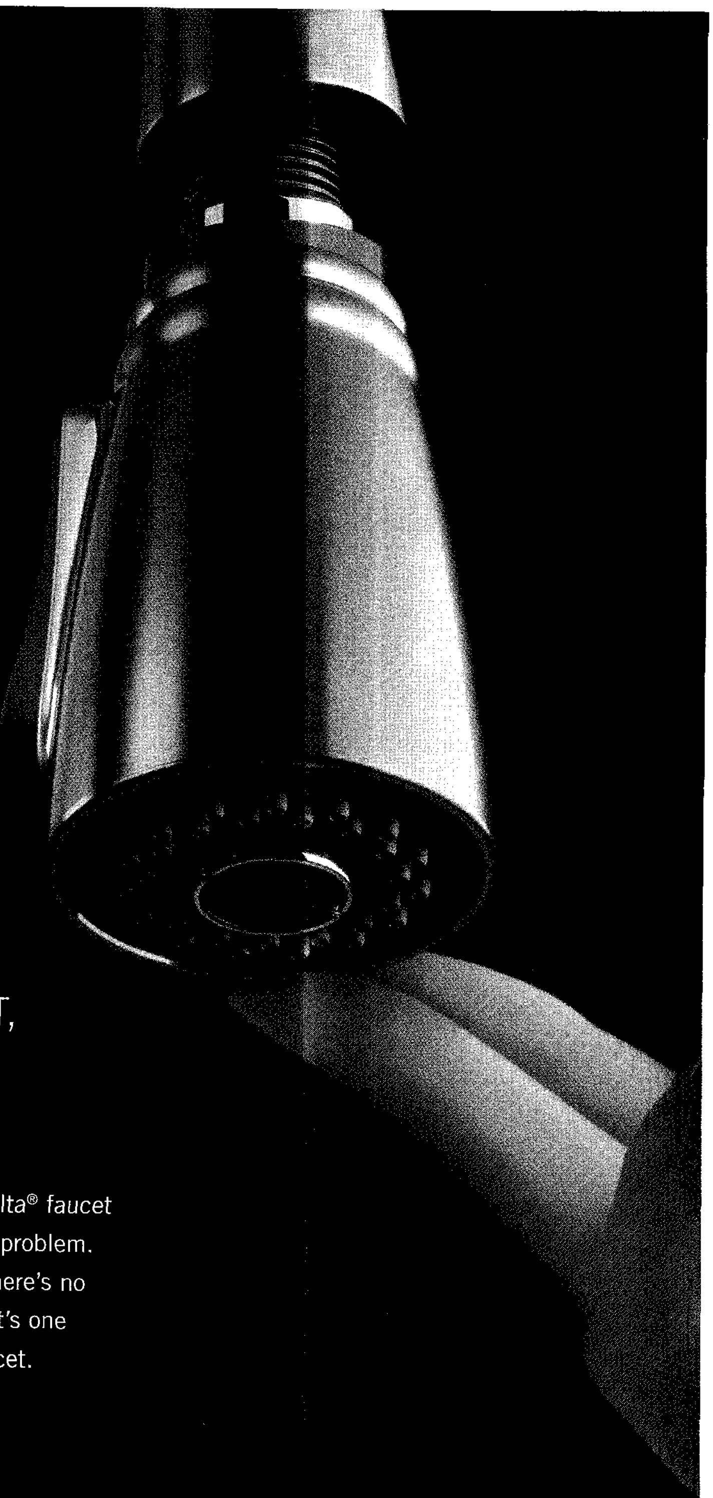
IFC CENTER

323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—Through April 5: "After the Revolution: Cuba on Screen." Feb. 6-8 at 11 A.M.: "Strawberry and Chocolate" (1994, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea & Juan Carlos Tabío; in Spanish). ♦ Feb. 13-16 at 11 A.M.: "I Am Cuba" (1964, Mikhail Kalatozov; in Spanish). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." Feb. 6-7: "The Objective" (2009, Daniel Myrick).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"Batiste Madalena and the Cinema of the 1920s." Feb. 4 at 1:30 and Feb. 7 at 6:30: "Loves of Carmen" (1927, Raoul Walsh; silent). ♦ Feb. 5 at 1:30 and Feb. 7 at 2: "Variety" (1925, E. A. Dupont; silent). ♦ Feb. 6 at 1:30 and Feb. 7 at 8:30: "The Kid Brother" (1927, Ted Wilde; silent) and an excerpt from "The Wanderer" (1926, Walsh; silent). ♦ Through Feb. 28: The films of Angela Ricci Lucchi and Yervant Gianikian. Feb. 4 at 6: Short-film program, followed by a discussion with the filmmakers. ♦ Feb. 4 at 8: Short-film program, including "Song of the Earth: Gustav Mahler" (1982), followed by a discussion with the filmmakers. ♦ Feb. 6 at 6: "From the Pole to the Equator" (1986). ♦ Feb. 7 at 2: "Electric Fragments," a six-part series (2001-05). ♦ Feb. 7 at 4: "Men, Years, Life" (1990) and "Earthquake" (1989-2006). ♦ Feb. 8 at 1:30: "Balkan Inventory" (2000). ♦ Feb. 12 at 6: "Oh! Uomo" (2004). ♦ Feb. 12 at 8: "Prisoners of War" (1995). ♦ Feb. 13 at 8: "On the Heights All Is Peace" (1998). ♦ Feb. 14 at 4: "Images of the East, Barbaric Tourism" (2001).

HONORE BROWN



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RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—"Cabaret Cinema." Feb. 6 at 9:30: "Valley of the Dolls" (†), introduced by the actor Alan Cumming. ♦ Feb. 13 at 9:30: "Elephant Walk" (1953, William Dieterle), introduced by the writer Foster Hirsch.

READINGS AND TALKS

THE HAPPY ENDING SERIES @ JOE'S PUB
The monthly series continues with the writers Sarah Manguso and Jayne Anne Phillips and the pianist Daniel Knox. (425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. Feb. 4 at 7.)

THE NEW SCHOOL
Virginia Heffernan, a columnist for the *Times Magazine*, moderates a discussion on Feb. 5 at 6:30 about online storytelling, with the writers Mary Feuer (the Web show "lonelygirl15"), Kathleen Grace and Thom Woodley (the Web show "The All-for-Nots"), Amy B. Harris (HBO's "Sex and the City"), and others. (66 W. 12th St. For more information, call 212-996-7606.)

IDLEWILD BOOKS
The online journal *Words Without Borders* presents a discussion about translating "Don Quixote," with the translator Edith Grossman and the Spanish novelist and critic Eduardo Lago. (12 W. 19th St. No tickets necessary. Feb. 5 at 7.)

"UPSTAIRS AT THE SQUARE"
The pairing of writers and musicians at the Union Square Barnes & Noble gets under way for the New Year, with appearances by the poet Nikki Giovanni and the boy soldier turned memoirist turned hip-hop artist Emmanuel Jal. (33 E. 17th St. No tickets necessary. Feb. 5 at 7.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

CRASH MANSION
With the *Christian Science Monitor* announcing that it plans to cease publishing a print edition and move its operations entirely to the Internet and the same strategy reportedly in the works at *U.S. News & World Report* and other publications, the future of journalism increasingly looks like it's going to be in the electronic realm. Entering into the competition for online readers is the new site therumpus.net, a compendium of original content, blogs, and stories from around the World Wide Web. The site celebrates its launch with a party on Feb. 5 at 7. With performances by the musicians Will Sheff and Timothy Bracy; readings by James Frey, Andrew Sean Greer, and Jonathan Ames; and an appearance by Starlee Kine, of the radio show "This American Life." (199 Bowery. For more information, visit therumpus.net.)

THE BELL HOUSE
In the past year, the Brooklyn-based comedian Eugene Mirman has toured with bands, appeared on HBO's "Flight of the Conchords," and covered the Republican and Democratic Conventions; now he's publishing a self-help book, "The Will to Whatevs." On Feb. 10 at 8, he celebrates its release with a party featuring performances by Kristen Schaal, John Oliver, John Hodgman, and Paul F. Tompkins and a d.j. set by Sarah Vowell. (149 7th St., between Second and Third Aves., Brooklyn. 718-643-6510.)

HOUSING WORKS BOOKSTORE CAFÉ
The downtown literary center's "Valentine's Day Personal Media Mixer and Confessional Culture Variety Show" provides an alternative to traditional romantic gatherings. It includes performances by the folks behind PostSecret, an art project that catalogues postcards that have secrets anonymously written on one side, *Found Magazine*, a compendium of fascinating discards, and the Web site and book "Six-Word Memoirs," among other activities. (126 Crosby St. 212-334-3324. Feb. 14 at 8.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
After a midseason, mid-priced sale of Impressionist and modern art (Feb. 11), **Christie's** offers books and manuscripts (Feb. 12), with a special session devoted to one very precious lot: the original handwritten copy of Lincoln's reëlection speech from 1864, one of only a few Lincoln manuscripts still in private hands. Later that day, the house offers its second sale devoted to the glamorous Constantiner collection of photographs—including a very frank, black-and white nude of the not yet famous Madonna taken by Lee Friedlander in 1979. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ Those who still have cash to spare will find plenty to indulge in at **Sotheby's** auction of jewelry (Feb. 4), including a gorgeous platinum-and-black-enamel compact made by Van Cleef and Arpels in the swinging nineteen-twenties; the following week the house will hold its own midseason sale of moderately priced Impressionist and modern art (Feb. 12). (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ Tasteful excess is always the fashion at **Doyle's** periodic sales of furniture and decorations from the Belle Époque, the next of which will be held on Feb. 11. (175 E. 87th St. 212-427-2730.)

NEWYORKER.COM

Visit the Goings On blog, at www.newyorker.com/go/goingson, for additional cultural coverage and commentary.

JASHAR AWAN

ON THE HORIZON

CLASSICAL MUSIC
HAYDN SEEK

Feb. 18–28

In a challenging time for opera in New York, Gotham Chamber Opera is swinging for the fence, bringing in Mark Morris to stage Haydn's "L'Isola Disabitata" ("The Desert Island") at John Jay College. (212-279-4200.)

THE THEATRE
MEDIUM COOL

Feb. 26

Angela Lansbury returns to Broadway in Noël Coward's 1941 comedy, "Blithe Spirit," along with Rupert Everett (in his Broadway début), Christine Ebersole, and Jayne Atkinson. Michael Blakemore directs, at the Shubert. (212-239-6200.)

NIGHT LIFE
STAR STRUCK

Feb. 27–28

Last fall in Los Angeles, the Irish bard Van Morrison performed his acclaimed 1968 album, "Astral Weeks," live at the Hollywood Bowl—the first time he had performed the entire album in sequence since its original release. The sets were recorded, and a live album is about to be issued. Later this month, Morrison restages the song cycle at the Wamu Theatre. (800-745-3000.)

MOVIES
THEY'VE GOT GAUL

March 6–12

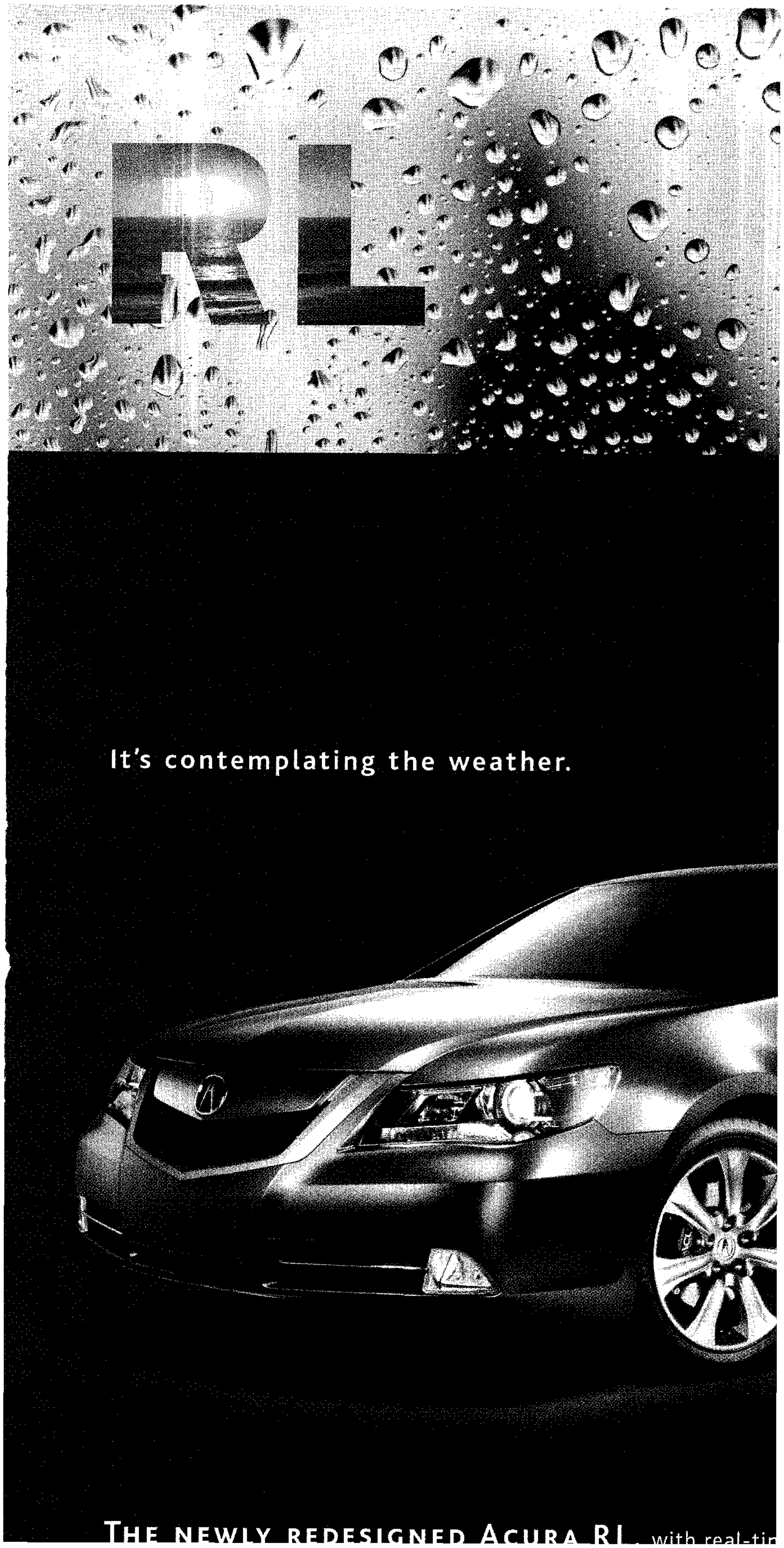
IFC Films, which offers new releases at its movie theatre as well as video on demand, has become a crucial outlet for foreign and independent filmmakers in search of an audience. BAM's upcoming tribute to the distributor pays special attention to French cinema, with weeklong premières of new films by Christophe Honoré and Philippe Garrel alongside Olivier Assayas's "Summer Hours" and other new work, from Europe and Asia. (718-636-4100.)

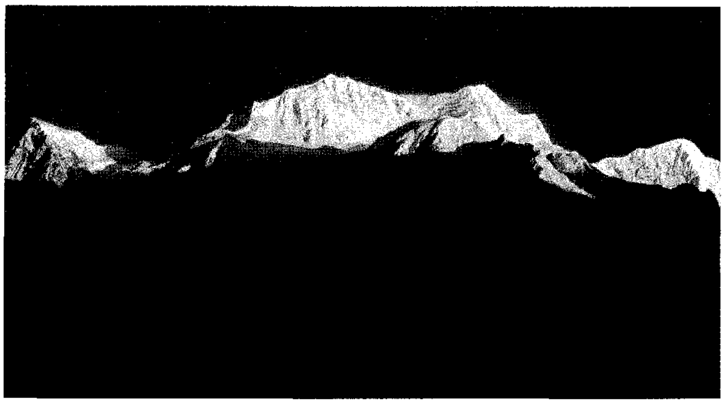
ART
THE CHOSON ONES

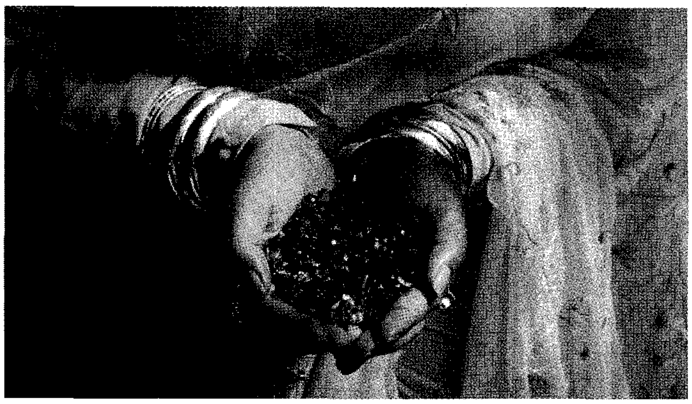
March 17–June 21

As the Renaissance flourished in Europe, a similar cultural surge was under way in the courts and temples of Korea. "Art of the Korean Renaissance, 1400–1600," at the Met, will feature some fifty examples of secular and religious painting, porcelain, sculpture, and metalwork. (212-535-7710.)

Van Morrison's "Astral Weeks," at the Wamu Theatre.


RL
It's contemplating the weather.
THE NEWLY REDESIGNED ACURA RL with real-ti





SPIRIT OF INDIA

Where Great Journeys Begin

THE DAZZLING DIVERSITY OF INDIA'S billion-plus people and eon-spanning cultures has long lured travelers. Yet with a landmass of more than a million square miles stretching from the tropics to the breathtaking Himalayas, the size of the subcontinent challenges one to first gain a foothold—and then an understanding.

Pursuing a particular passion in this ecstatically exotic country—while allowing for serendipitous diversions—is one route to an Indian adventure. Consider the following:

Adventures on High The Himalayas aren't simply for peripatetic mountaineers; at lower altitudes adventurers can ski and snowboard, go white-water rafting, take a wildlife safari via jeep, horse, boat, or elephant, and overnight in a remote, yet ultra-luxurious, camp. Hikers have plenty of scenic options, too, like trekking through the Doon Valley meadows or following the picturesque Singalila Ridge trail from Darjeeling.

Beach Holidays Coastal India spans more than four thousand miles, from the Bay of Bengal in the east to the Arabian Sea in the west. The country's fourth-largest city, Chennai, is home to Marina Beach, one of the world's longest. Nearby, Kovalam's warm and gentle waters lap palm-fringed bays. And seclusion-seekers can romp along Marari Beach's sands in Kerala. December through April is the ideal time to visit the Andaman Islands, a tropical archipelago of untouched beaches and jungle forest in the Bay of Bengal. Lakshadweep, a group of islands off the coast of Kerala, is a popular destination for water sports, with atolls and coral reefs that attract elaborate marine life. Best known of India's beach regions, charming Goa continues to lure visitors to its more than sixty miles of beachfront and its hedonistic style.

Into the Wild In the Himalayan foothills, Jim Corbett National Park is best known for its resident Bengal tigers, leopards, and elephants. The popular Ranthambore Wildlife Sanctuary in Rajasthan, once the maharajas' hunting ground, is home to marsh crocodiles, hyenas, tigers, gazelles, and a richly diverse avian population. Kerala's Periyar National Park and Tiger Reserve is one of the most outstanding wildlife parks in the world. The sanctuary surrounds a ten-square-mile lake, where herds of wild elephants regularly frolic.

Thrill of the Hunt For centuries the masterful craftsmen and women of India have produced magnificent work at often astoundingly reasonable prices. Sari weaving in Varanasi has long been an art. Paithan, near Aurangabad, is known for its embroidered saris shot through with gold and silver silken threads. And handmade silk Kashmiri carpets endure for generations. Shoppers with an eye for precious and semi-precious gems head for Jaipur, where haggling over the price is a tradition. Tea connoisseurs hie to Darjeeling to sample aromatic blends cultivated at plantations.

Royal Rails Travel by train may be the greatest way to experience the subcontinent. India's network of tracks are nearly 40,000 miles, and the comforts afforded by air-conditioned carriages and sumptuous amenities help create opportunities to befriend fellow passengers. For an optimal experience, book passage on one of India's many luxury trains, where staterooms and service are often as spectacular as the stops. The Royal Palace on Wheels, which originates in Delhi, pauses for excursions to Ranthambore, Udaipur's City Palace, and Agra's legendary Taj Mahal. Other luxury trains travel through the heart of India on journeys of natural beauty. The Deccan Odyssey stops at historic destinations including the Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain caves in Ellora, a World Heritage site featuring rock-cut chapels and temples. The Golden Chariot departs each week from Bangalore bound for sites like the Mysore Palace, and the Maha Parinirvana Express, reminiscent of train travel in the days of the Raj, chugs through eastern India on a Buddhist circuit.

Wellness Route Some of the oldest healing therapies in human history began in India. Visitors can meditate on the banks of the Ganges, repair to the temples along the Western Ghats, take hatha yoga classes at an authentic ashram, or self-pamper at luxurious retreats like Ananda in the Himalayas. Along the verdant landscapes of Goa, Karnataka, and Kerala, resorts offer Ayurveda treatments and tranquil spas. Rishikesh, the gateway to the Himalayas in northern India, is a spiritual destination nicknamed the world's yoga capital. It is widely believed that meditation here brings one closer to the attainment of enlightenment or the state of higher consciousness known as *moksha*.

TOP, FROM LEFT: SUNSET ON THE KANCHENJUNGA RANGE OF THE HIMALAYAS ©BLAINE HARRINGTON III/ALAMY; HANDFUL OF AMETHYSTS ©FLORIS LEEUWENBERG/CORBIS

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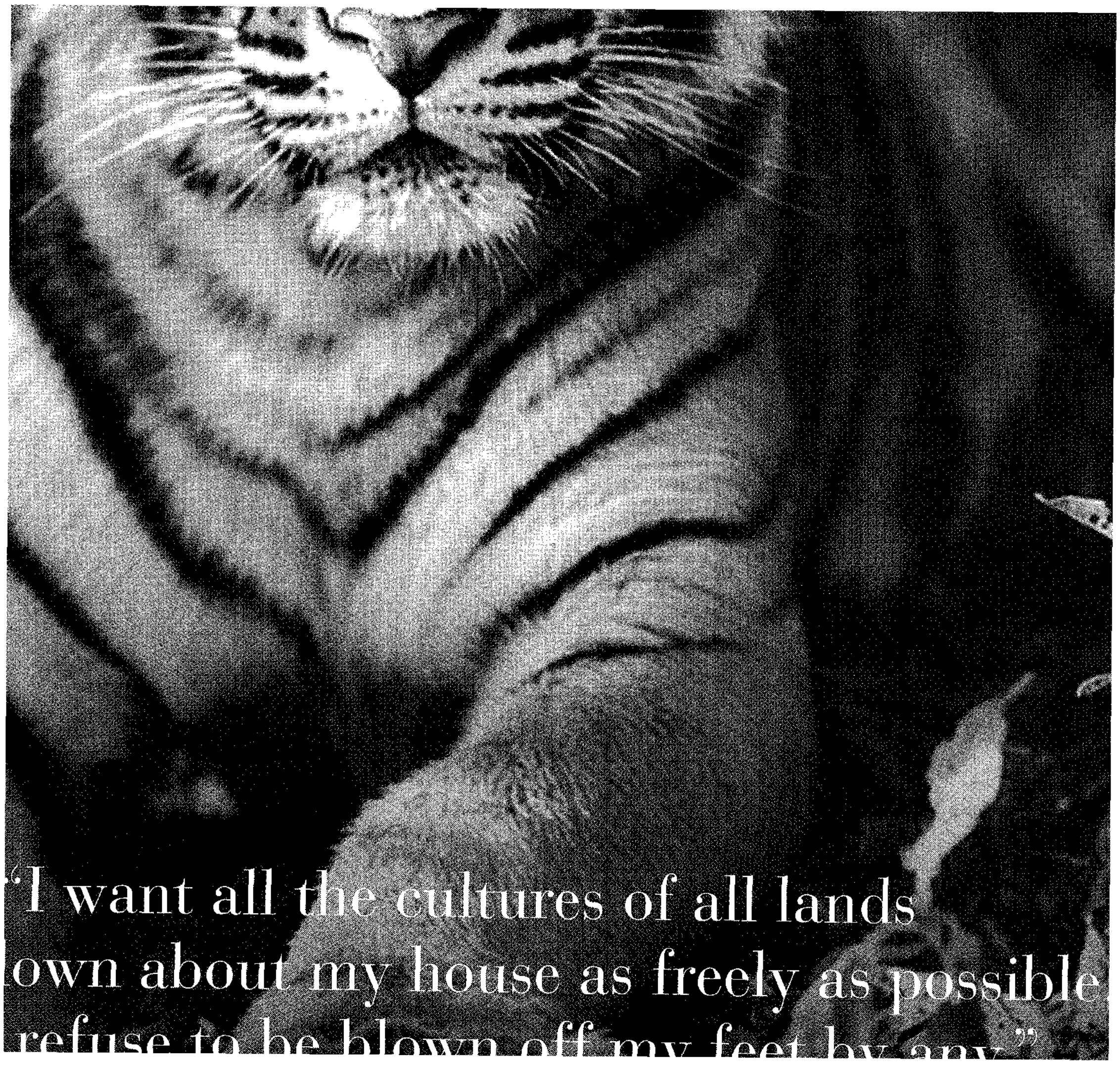
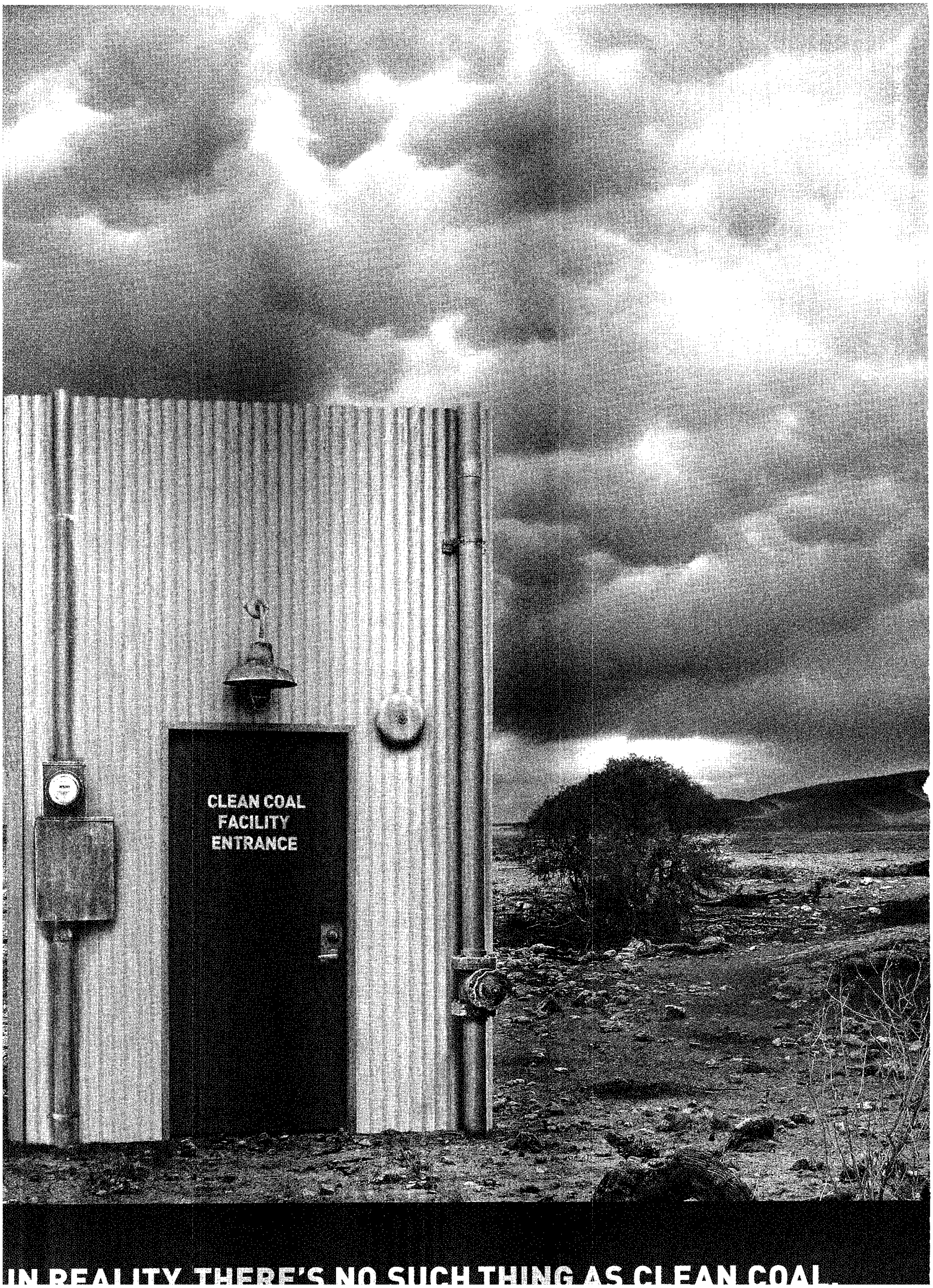


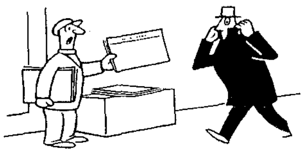
“I want all the cultures of all lands
own about my house as freely as possible.
refuse to be blown off my feet by any.”


CLEAN COAL
FACILITY
ENTRANCE
IN REALITY THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS CLEAN COAL.

THE
NEW YORKER

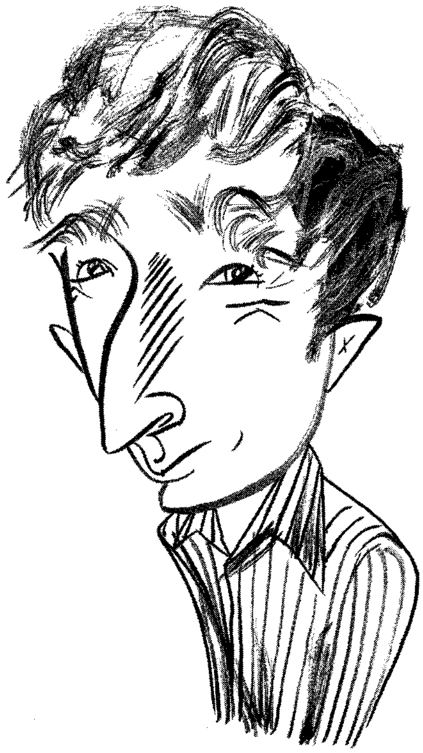
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

POSTSCRIPT
JOHN UPDIKE



John Updike (1932-2009) once said that his first publication and nearly sixty-year-long relationship with this magazine was the great professional event of his life—no, he called it the *ecstatic* event of his professional life—and he never tired (for younger writers, it was inspiring to see how he never tired) of seeing his prose in Caslon type, his name for all those decades appended to, or, later, preambling, a story or a review in these pages. It was part of the great good luck of this magazine that he needed, or indulged, us, and that his appetites and ambitions matched the dreams of the editors—which is only to say that several generations of editors tossed a bit less fitfully at 3 A.M., knowing that, if a book on some knotty modern subject had been sent out to Massachusetts, two weeks later there was sure to be, rebounding back, nine or ten pages of perfectly tuned prose—typo-free, full of cunning synopsis, serene judgment, big news (a generation got educated on Borges and Nabokov alongside him), bite without tooth marks, and always at the end a permanent turn of phrase or a metaphor, not a witticism merely but a benediction, a blessing, an insight that lifted it far above mere reviewing and into a form of witty personal poetry.

And, as those same generations of editors learned, the near-perfect thing was usually prefaced by a letter gaily outlining its supposed inadequacies, and all the reasons the editors might wisely prefer not to run it at all—a form of modesty that, given not just the quality but the heat and shimmer of what was enclosed, passed the edge of modesty to touch the edge of superstition: it was, one realized, Updike's way of staying young, an outsider, pressing his face against a window, still the long-faced brilliant boy on a remote Pennsylvania farm turning the pages of a New York magazine and quietly deciding to be a cartoonist and a humorist and a parodist, while the loving and ambitious mother fretted and the weak but honest father listened to the radio (a family triangle that he inserted, again and again, into all our imaginations). He was still a kid from Shillington dreaming of being a New York wit, and feeling lucky that he had been allowed in at all.



TOM BACHTELL

Those reviews alone would have been enough to make a major career, each one not laying down the law for the writer but bringing news to the reader. (What editor would not cry out in delight at finding a piece that made the simple and sage distinction that purposes are not points, that, where the *purpose* of "King Lear" was to purge the soul with pity and terror, its point was that old men should not retire prematurely.) And then one remembered that the prose was just the ivy on the drystone wall of his short stories, which provided a lyric, etched picture of a half century's domestic manners and longings. And *then* one remembered that the wall of stories was just a pleasant border surrounding the lawn and mansion of his twenty-three novels, which had cumulatively taken on the full weight of American social history, doing the classic job of the nineteenth-century novel as though no one had ever said you couldn't any longer, tracking our experience from the parched Truman era to gray-and-white Eisenhower and beyond to smiling Reagan and shaky Carter and even sexy Ford. (And then one recalled that the author might have traded in two or three of those novels for another volume or two of poetry, which was, of all his work, his special pet.) Thinking about the scale of that achievement, one turned back to the ivy, and hoped someday to climb at least that high.

John Updike was a fine colleague, a beaming platform presence, a valued contributor, a welcome visitor to the office, a genial supporter of younger writers—just a freelance writer living in Massachusetts, as he puckishly described himself. And, the hard part for his colleagues and friends to square, he was also one of the greatest of all modern writers, the first American writer since Henry James to get himself fully expressed, the man who broke the curse of incompleteness that had haunted American writing. As well as any writer ever has, he fulfilled Virginia Woolf's dictum that the writer's job is to get himself or herself expressed without impediments—to do so as Shakespeare and Jane Austen did, without hate or pause or protest or obvious special pleading or the thousand other ills that the embattled writer is heir to. Woolf meant not that the writer's job was to write a lot, or to register the self with a splash, but to get his or her real experience down: all the private pains and pictures, the look on a loving parent's face when humiliated in a school corridor, or the way girls smell in football season—to get it down and fix it there for good. Updike, to use a phrase he liked, *got it all in*, from snow in Greenwich Village on a fifties street to the weather in the American world.

If he gave so much to the magazine, he took something from it, too. He took, and kept, a tone. Updike the humorist is probably the least known or recognizable Updike of them all, but something of the White-cum-Thurber sound of the *New Yorker* that he joined—that bemused, ironically smiling but resolutely well-wishing, anti-malicious comic tone—lingered in his work till the very end. In the last year of his life, he wrote to an admirer that "humor is my default mode," and that he still dreamed of being the new Benchley, the next Perelman. He flourished in his early years here, writing Talk pieces and casuals (his parody of Harry Truman as the Adam of "Paradise Lost" is one small masterpiece among many), and the material of comedy remained implicit in almost every sentence he wrote: the dancing recognition of the likeness of the unlike, the will to treat the organic mechanically—his sexual congresses are blissful but funny, never "transcendent," because they are so entirely acts of organic machinery, wise souls made into copulating clockwork. The common sense that regularly inflected his judgments of big writers and dubious ideas had its origins in a humorous tradition, too; in his criticism he caught the notes of Wolcott Gibbs and Brendan Gill as much as those of Edmund Wilson.

And the comic current ran deeper even than that. Despite the lyrical surface of his prose, Updike was a realist, as comedians must be, and never even marginally a romantic. He was genuinely unseduced by all the myths of American romanticism: gorgeous Daisys and vast sinister Western landscapes are equally absent from his books. His girls and women are real, with scratchy pubic hair, and his American landscape of car dealerships and fast-food retreats held no place for doomed, exciting, existential gunmen. He was, for all those perfect shining sentences, a realist; the sentences sing, but they don't ennoble.

Given how seamlessly he fit here, it's a miracle that he ever got out; he could have stayed at the magazine, tried out all the chairs, and become a local god. But he did something braver. He fled New York for Ipswich, and then made a bolder journey into writing, absorbing the hardest and highest of the moderns—Proust and Nabokov first of all, but Borges and Henry Green and so many others—without abandoning the old sounds he loved, either. The first paragraph of his great story "Museums and Women," from 1967, is a summation, almost a formula, of the compound, mature Updike style:

> Conjoined, the two words are seen to be mutually transparent; the E's, the M's blend—the M's framing and squaring the structure lend resonance and a curious formal weight to the M central in the creature, which it dominates like a dark core winged with flitting syllables. Both words hum. Both suggest radiance, antiquity, mystery, and duty.

Nabokov haunts the long first sentence, but the second—"Both words hum"—is pure White, and the last, like the sum of them all, is entirely Updike, turning a sensation into a lighthearted sermon, a little parable. High modernism plus American humor equals this writer who encompassed them both.

A virtuoso, he was never content with virtuosity. He sang like Henry James, but he saw like Sinclair Lewis. The two sides of American fiction—the precise, realist, encyclopedic appetite to get it all in, and the exquisitist urge to make writing out of sensation rendered exactly—were both alive in him. He was at once conjurer and chronicler, and it is this that makes the great Updike novels masterpieces properly so called: they get it all in and they get it all right. Describing the "Rabbit" books to a new reader, one is stunned to be reminded of their apparent inconsequence: the hero isn't a great bootlegger who gets killed, or a boy on a raft with a runaway slave, or even a suicidal small-town gent or an exotic expatriate in Spain. He doesn't do anything grand. He's a high-school basketball star in a dying town; he runs a Toyota dealership; he has an affair or two with a woman; he stays married; he has a hopeless son. And yet Rabbit's small acts hold not just truth but also glamour, a mystery and glow almost Proustian.

Two big things separated him from other writers of his time, and one joined him to it. His patriotism, which made him pro-war in the sixties, and his religious faith were both, though hardly alien to other writers, expressed in his work with a simplicity of feeling that connected him to his own lower-middle-class roots and to the common experience of the country. He could not very easily imagine himself living outside America, and his love of nation had an authentic plainness to it. (He wrote of Reagan that he was like God: you never knew what he knew, everything or nothing.) He could understand Reagan and Nixon, and their supporters, in a way that his more urban friends didn't try to. His Christian faith, in turn, shaped by the theologian Karl Barth, was American in its mysterious optimism; who can forget his description of the Parable of the Talents, and how he could feel the damp earth of the boy who buried them? At the other end of his sensibility, the sexual explicitness that he pioneered in American fiction was additive, ameliorative—the one thing that had been left undescribed, a piece of the world's experience previously unfixed. Compared with more obvious pioneers of sex writing, how blended his descriptions are into a larger world of memory: sex in Updike happens not in a stripped-down theatre of two but in a coliseum of many, part of the continuum of sensation in which we live.

Throughout all that varied work,

one theme rose and was repeated over and over. Updike's great subject was the American attempt to fill the gap left by faith with the materials produced by mass culture. He documented how the death of a credible religious belief has been offset by sex and adultery and movies and sports and Toyotas and family love and family obligation. For Updike, this effort was blessed, and very nearly successful. Unlike his European contemporaries, who saw the same space and the attempted filling as mere aridity and deprivation, Updike was close enough to, and fond enough of, the source of postwar material abundance to love it fully, and for itself. (And he knew enough of the decade of deprivation that preceded the big blossoming never to be jaded about plenty.) He viewed the material culture of American life with a benign, appreciative ironic eye. But he had no illusions, either, about its ability to cover the failure or wish away mortality. His 1996 novel "In the Beauty of the Lilies"—which may well emerge as the sort of late masterpiece overlooked or praised by rote in its day, only to be rediscovered by another generation—makes this almost schematically apparent: the death of American religion is matched by the rise of American movies. It is no accident that the final heart attack of his hero and alter ego Harry Angstrom, Rabbit himself, is preceded by the sudden rush of knowledge that the department-store Christmases of his childhood and the wonderful pop music of his adolescence were both calculated commercial frauds.

Comedy *was* his default mode, though, and comedy is made of realism alloyed with love. A note of happiness rings through Updike's prose, and draws us to it, makes us happy when we read it. It is not a fatuous happiness, or a happiness unaware of death (a preoccupation with death and dying was a steady feature of his work), but neither does it cede too much to mere mortality. One has a sense of someone who—as much as, though with more wit than, Andy Warhol—has spent a good deal of his life liking things. Women's clothes, their hair, the hybridization of American accents; the way that the hyper-cold of the airline baggage compartment can be felt like a secret in the bag as you unpack—all these images and moments, recalled at random from his work, are not just reported but quietly rhapsodized, registered with love. It is his affections that rise, and that we recall.

One would want, therefore, to triangulate him, as he once did in an early and beautiful elegy for T. S. Eliot, somewhere among three other comic and ecstatic writers: that other bemused Protestant Charles Schulz, for a sense of the possibilities in a popular form and the love of the sure cartoonist's touch; his fellow-Readingite Wallace Stevens, for the intimation of the numinous in the ordinary Sunday mornings of the mid-Atlantic states; and—why not?—the Shakespeare of the comedies and sonnets, for the ability to get himself expressed fully, unimpeded, and for the desire, even in the face of death, to set down, for readers still unborn, all the sweetness of our common life.

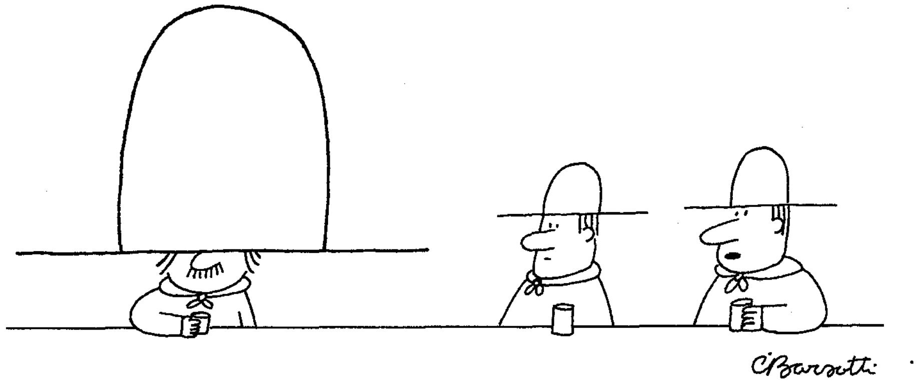
—*Adam Gopnik*

AN EDITOR'S NOTE
THE FADEAWAY

Colleagues for more than half a century, writer-editor partners for more than half that time, John Updike and I were close at a fixed distance—he at home north of Boston, I in my *New Yorker* office near Bryant Park—but spoke voluminously by telephone, by manuscripts and galley proofs, and also via his typed, cheerful two-and-a-half-by-five-and-a-half white postcards that bore his pale-blue name and address hand-stamped in the northwest corner. Now and then he would turn up at the office, startling me once again with his height and his tweeds, that major nose, and his bright eyes and upbent smile; he spoke in a light half whisper and, near the end of each visit, somehow withdrew a little, growing more private and less visible even before he turned away. The fadeaway, as I came to think of it, may have had to do with his exile from his own writing that day, while travelling; the spacious writing part of him was held to one side when not engaged, kept ready for its engrossing daily stint back home. Informally august, he stayed young after his hair turned white, but the additions of fame and a vast work now made him seem Colonial, ready for the portrait on a postage stamp.

A similar sense of shift and distracting clarity often overtook a reader in one of Updike's stories when an ordinary enough event or small-town American scene—a slight earthquake, a 5.4 on the Richter scale, awakening a man at home in bed in the early morning; a mother on her way to work in the nineteen-thirties running for a streetcar in Pennsylvania; a man in his late fifties outside his living room in the winter finding the moons of Jupiter with his new home telescope—slides to another breadth and meaning in the space of a sentence or two. This is what Updike has had in mind for us all along. He invites us into his story and walks us easily along; all is recognizable and reassuringly alive, but then—we've had no warning—we're seized with a flooding fresh knowledge, in the same fashion that sadness or some ancient night remembrance can sometimes take us in its teeth. Updike was in his twenties and thirties when most of his seventeen stories about the Maples were being written, but his expert and unpatronizing account of a suburban marriage—husband and wife, neighbors and kids, meals and affairs and politics and anxiety—also carried this double view. There's something terrifying about it all, because these young people, parents and children alike, are such beginners, not ready for so much life.

Updike's writing is light and springy, the tone unforced; often happiness is almost in view, despite age or disappointments. He is not mawkish or insistently gloomy. Death is frequently mentioned but for the time being is postponed. Time itself is bendable in these stories; the characters are aware of themselves at many stages. This is Updike country: intelligent and Eastern, mostly Protestant, more or less moneyed. We understand and read on, and then—and then a middle-aged married man named Fanshawe remembers how he had "ceased to fear death—or, so to say, to grasp it"—at the moment when he first slept with a woman named Lorna Kramer. Or the young father, Richard Maple, at the end of a day when he and his wife, Joan, have been explaining to their young children that they are



"All hat and no cattle, but my God, what a hat."

going to separate and try living apart for the summer, ending their marriage at least for now, is telling the news to his teen-age son, in bed and just home from a rock concert, and the teary boy stops him with a word: "Why?" He has forgotten why. Or that young woman from the past—Updike's mother without a doubt, but seen this time as the mother of a man named Joey in a long 1990 story, "A Sandstone Farmhouse"—"running to catch the trolley, the world of the thirties shabby and solid around her, the porches, the blue midsummer hydrangeas, this tiny well-dressed figure in her diminishing pocket of time, her future unknown, her death, her farm, far from her mind."

Updike's sentences are fresh-painted. In all his writing, critical or fictional or reportorial, he is a fabulous noticer and expander; he's invented HD. So armed, he felt free from the start to take up and engage with all that lay within the range of his attention and put it down on paper. He had never to my knowledge written about sports when, on a morning in late September, 1960, he was stood up by a woman in Boston with whom he had an assignation and instead went to Fenway Park to see the Red Sox, in the final home game of Ted Williams's career. Ted hit a home run in his last at-bat, and Updike came home and wrote "Hub Fans Bid Kid Adieu" and sent it off to the magazine: the most celebrated baseball piece ever. The text grew not just out of the event but from Updike's youthful attachment to the Splendid Splinter; when he decided to leave New York and *The New Yorker*, in 1957, and move his young family to the suburbs, he chose Boston, as he later explained, in part to be closer to Ted Williams. My own baseball writing was still two years away when I first read "Hub Fans Bid Kid Adieu," and though it took me a while to become aware of it, John had already supplied my tone, while also seeming to invite me to try for a good sentence now and then, down the line, like the one he slips in when Williams fails to doff his cap after circling the bases in the wake of that homer: "Gods do not answer letters."

As a contributor, he was patient with editing, and pertinaciously involved with his product: an editor's dream. My end of the work was to point out an occasional inconsistent or extraneous sentence, or a passage that wanted something more. Almost under his breath over our phone connection, while we looked at the same lines, he would try out an alternative: "Which one sounds better, do you think?" Sighing, he would take us back over the same few words again and again, then propose or listen to a switch of some sort, and try again. All writers do this, but not many with such a lavishly extended consideration. He wanted to see each galley, each tiny change, right down to the late-closing page proofs, which he often managed to return by overnight mail an hour or so before closing, with new sentences or passages, handwritten in the margins in a soft pencil, that were fresher and more inventive and revealing than what had been there before. You watched him write.

This process sounds old-fashioned, but Updike was probably the very first *New Yorker* writer to shift over to a computer, back in the early eighties. "I don't know how this will change my writing," he wrote to me in advance, "but it will." He was right, of course: the flavor was mysteriously different, the same wine but of another year.

By the end, there were a hundred and forty-six John Updike stories that ran in the magazine, starting with "Friends from Philadelphia," in the issue of October 30, 1954, and finishing with "The Full Glass," in the May 26th issue last year. Another several dozen casuals or works of humor ran up to "A Desert Encounter," on October 20, 2008. All this, of course, was in addition to his five hundred-odd reviews and poems and critical essays in *The New Yorker*, and to one side of or on top of the twenty-three novels, the art criticism for *The New York Review of Books*, and the steady rush of pieces and stories published elsewhere. He often insisted that he was about to run dry. When I became his fiction editor, early in 1976, succeeding William Maxwell, I was alarmed to hear from him that his best fiction-writing days were probably behind him. This was nonsense; his output then was a steady three or four first-class stories per year, but to hear him tell it the end was near. "Fiction is a young man's game," he said querulously. I had not yet understood how much he loved sounding old. Rabbit Angstrom, we might notice, dies of old age, in effect, in "Rabbit at Rest," the fourth and final book of the celebrated work, at the age of fifty-six.

By the time his production level did in fact slow a bit, twenty years down the line, I'd found a little trick that he and I enjoyed. Some mornings when we were talking idly on the telephone, perhaps still again about the Sox' pitching, I would tell him that there was a sharp new story coming up in the next issue—something different, by a young man or woman we'd been following for some time now. "*Rea*-lly!" he would cry, his voice rising. He was still a close reader of every issue, and over the years as a reviewer for the magazine he had been amazingly generous to beginning talents. But this was beside the point, as we understood. A couple of weeks would go by and then—not every time, but sometimes—my little pile of morning mail would include a tan manuscript envelope with his name stamped in blue up in the corner: a new story by John Updike.

—*Roger Angell*

THE FINANCIAL PAGE

HAZARDOUS MATERIALS?

In the course of the ongoing financial crisis, we've been ceaselessly reminded of the dangers of moral hazard—the idea that if people are insulated from the negative effects of their gambles they are more likely to act rashly. When Bear Stearns was bailed out, last spring, the move was attacked for exacerbating the threat of moral hazard. When Lehman Brothers was allowed to go bankrupt, in mid-September, the decision was praised by some for reducing the risk of moral hazard. These days, moral-hazard concerns are making policymakers cautious about stemming the rise in foreclosures, and about dealing with ailing banks: if we bail out banks or homeowners, we're told, it will only encourage more recklessness.

The concept of moral hazard seems commonsensical. A frequently cited example is fire insurance: people who know they'll be reimbursed if their house burns down supposedly won't worry as much about preventing fires, and so will have more fires than people who don't have insurance. By extension, the argument goes, if banks think that the government will bail them out in a pinch, they're more likely to make risky bets. That's why moral-hazard fundamentalists advocated letting Lehman Brothers fail, and making it clear that bad decisions have consequences.

Of course, not acting also has costs, and sometimes—as in the case of Lehman's failure—those costs are immense. So, if the threat of moral hazard is going to encourage inaction in a crisis, we should be sure that threat is real. And there certainly are situations where moral hazard does seem to have an effect on people's choices. Deposit insurance can make depositors less vigilant about the quality of banks, increasing the likelihood that bankers will make bad gambles with depositors' money, as they did during the savings-and-loan crisis of the eighties. In other circumstances, though, moral hazard seems to have a much smaller impact. And, in the case of public-sector intervention during financial crises, evidence for its dangers is surprisingly flimsy.

The International Monetary Fund, for example, has helped bail out developing countries across the globe. If those bailouts heightened moral hazard, you'd expect the recipient countries to be more reckless in their spending and borrowing, and outside investors to be more careless in their lending. Yet a number of studies looking at the effects of I.M.F. bailouts on things like credit spreads and capital flows have found little evidence for that. On the contrary, a 2002 study by Steven Kamin, of the Federal Reserve, found that, when it came to investing in developing countries, "investors appear to be discriminating among credit risks more carefully than ever." Similarly, the U.S. government's bailout of banks this fall hasn't led them to lend rashly; indeed, they've been attacked for not lending enough. Even the example of fire insurance doesn't provide much proof of moral hazard: as it turns out, people who are insured often have fewer accidents, not more. A recent study of businesses in Taiwan suggests that this may be because companies with fire insurance actually take more precautions against fires—the reverse of what the theory of moral hazard predicts.

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

Why might the effects of moral hazard be smaller than expected? To begin with, most bailouts aren't like deposit insurance, which is certain and quick. Financial bailouts are uncertain and messy, and they typically occur only after institutions have already suffered extensive damage. Bear Stearns, for instance, was "saved" only after its shares had fallen almost ninety-five per cent from the previous year, and it seems unlikely that either its laid-off workers or its battered shareholders came out of the experience anxious to engage in more foolhardy behavior.

The moral-hazard argument also assumes that the most important factor shaping corporate decisions is the interest of the company as a whole. But, more often, what's shaping those decisions is the interest of individuals, and on Wall Street those interests are often only loosely connected to the long-term health of companies. The fact that people can reap enormous rewards for decisions that are beneficial in the short term but costly in the long term is likely to lead to reckless behavior, regardless of whether companies are bailed out or not. Even if we allow Citigroup to fail, after all, Chuck Prince, the former C.E.O., will still have walked away with a package reportedly worth more than seventy million dollars.

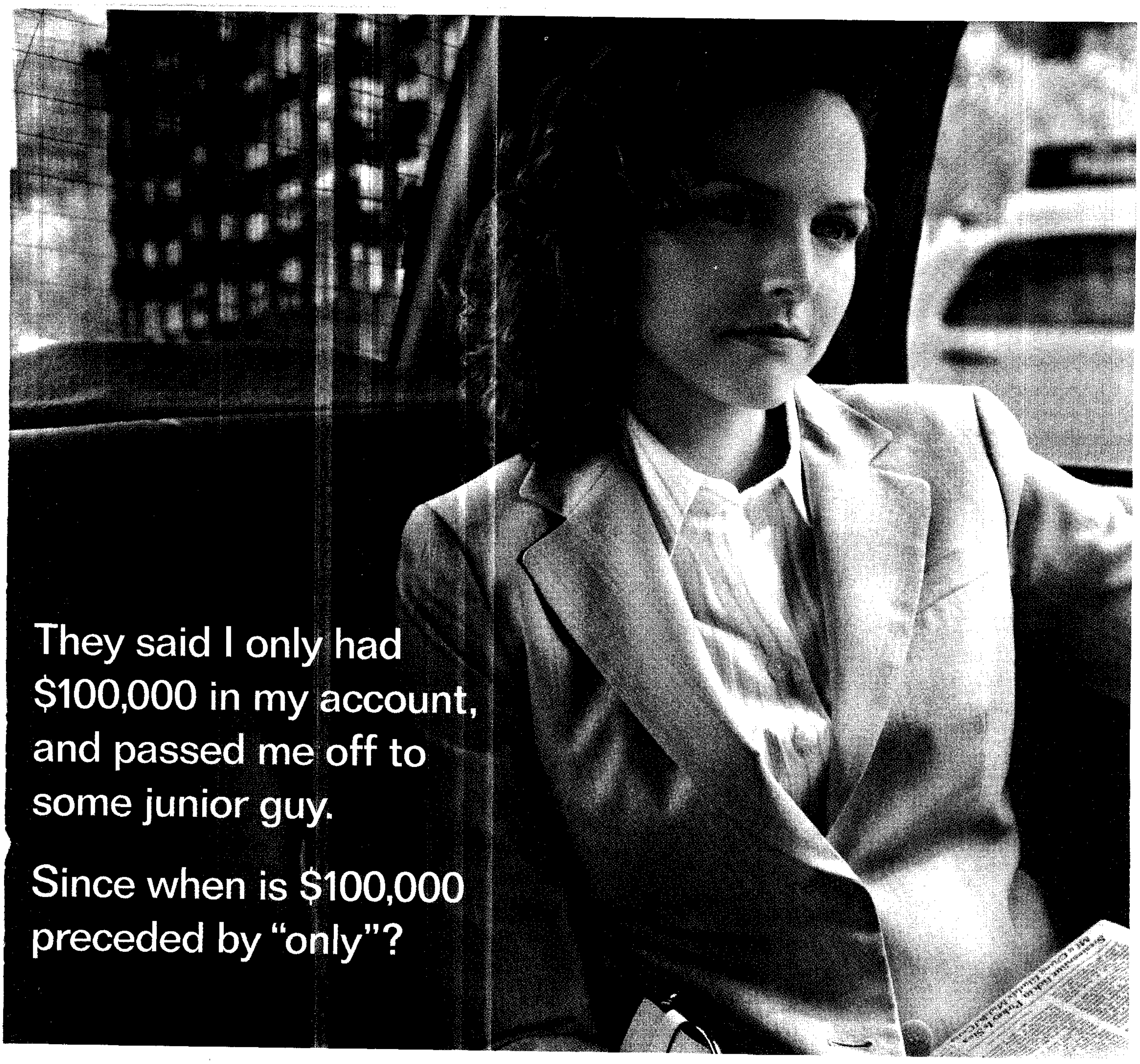
Finally, the biggest reason that moral hazard matters less than it might is that it can operate only if people actively countenance the possibility that their decisions could lead to complete disaster. But it's well documented that people generally, and investors particularly, are overconfident and significantly underestimate the chances of being wiped out. The moral-hazard fundamentalists argue that banks and other financial institutions will act recklessly if they think they'll be rescued in the event of failure. But Wall Street was reckless because it never believed that failure was even a possibility.

The patchiness of the moral-hazard argument doesn't mean that we should simply rubber-stamp another bank bailout; that may be both unjust and a poor strategy for whipping the financial sector into shape. But it does mean that the failure of Lehman Brothers was an unnecessary and costly sacrifice to moral-hazard fundamentalism. It also means that we should not sit quietly by because we fear that government action today will lead to reckless market behavior years from now. Moral hazard has its costs. But, so far, our fear of it has proved much more expensive.

—*James Surowiecki*

NEWYORKER.COM

The Balance Sheet, James Surowiecki's blog.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MEDICAL DISPATCH

THAT BUZZING SOUND

The mystery of tinnitus.

BY JEROME GROOPMAN

I noticed the sound one evening about a year ago. At first, I thought an alarm had been set off. Then I realized that the noise—a high-pitched drone—was mainly in my right ear. It has been with me ever since. The tone varies, from a soft whoosh like a shower to a piercing screech resembling a dental drill. When I am engaged in work at the hospital or in the laboratory, it seems distant. But in idle moments it gets louder and more annoying, once even jarring me from a dream.

Tinnitus—the false perception of sound in the absence of an acoustic stimulus, a phantom noise—is one of the most common clinical syndromes in the United States, affecting twelve per cent of men and almost fourteen per cent of women who are sixty-five and older. It only rarely afflicts the young, with one significant exception: those serving in the armed forces. Tinnitus affects nearly half the soldiers exposed to blasts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

This past August, I visited the University of Buffalo, which houses one of the major clinical and research centers for the evaluation and study of tinnitus. After filling out a detailed questionnaire, I met with Christina Stocking of the Speech-Language and Hearing Clinic, who has a doctorate in audiology and specializes in the condition. Stocking thought that I might have suffered noise trauma during a youth spent on the New York City subways. Sitting in the first row of a rock concert exposes you to between a hundred and ten and a hundred and twenty decibels; the screech of the New York subways can reach about a hundred and fifteen decibels. Moreover, since much of the New York subway system is underground, the noise reverberates in the tunnels, unlike in Boston, where many of the trains are above ground and noise dissipates, or in Paris, where several metro lines run on rubber wheels.

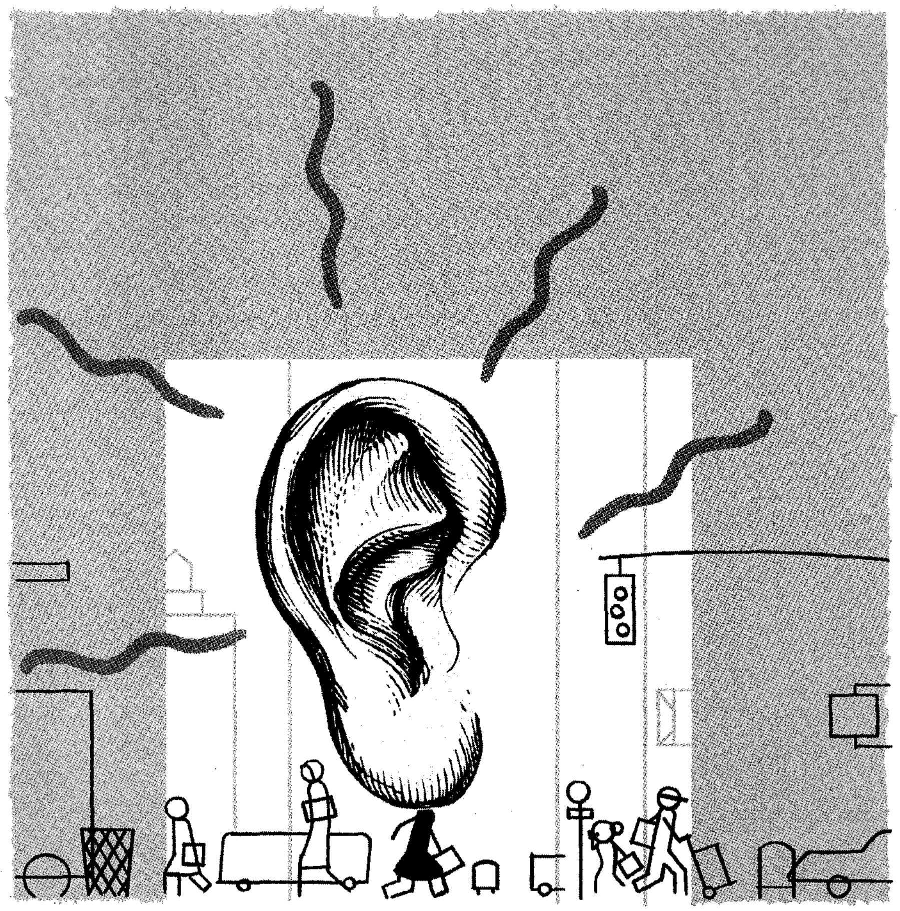
Normally, the outer ear, known as the pinna, collects sound waves and directs them into the ear canal, which carries the sound waves to the eardrum. In turn, the eardrum vibrates, and these tremors are picked up by the three tiny bones in the middle ear: the malleus (resembling a club), the incus (shaped like an anvil), and the stapes (similar to a stirrup). These bones amplify the sound vibrations and transmit them to the inner ear, where the cochlea converts the vibrations into electrical impulses, which travel from the acoustic nerve to the part of the brain that processes sound, the auditory cortex. Tinnitus can be temporary, caused by excess wax, an infection of the inner ear, or the toxic effects of drugs like aspirin (which appears to weaken the neural signals from the ear to the brain) or those used to treat cancer. Some people with normal hearing develop spontaneous tinnitus when placed in total silence; this is believed to be a response of the auditory cortex to the abnormal absence of all ambient sounds. But the majority of people with chronic symptoms develop them in conjunction with hearing loss. With the recent proliferation of MP3 players, rates of hearing loss and tinnitus may rise sharply in the coming years. A recent European Union study has projected that as many as ten million Europeans may be at risk of developing severe hearing loss as they age; and, according to the American Academy of Audiology, noise-induced hearing loss affects about one out of every eight children in the United States.

The range of tinnitus's severity is as wide as the ways of describing the syndrome. Martin Amis, in "Money," characterizes the tinnitus that his character John Self suffers as "jet take-offs, breaking glass, ice scratched from the tray." In "A Pair of Blue Eyes," Thomas Hardy's William Worm complains of "people frying fish: fry, fry, fry, all day long in my poor head." Some patients also suffer from hyperacusis, in which certain sounds are amplified in a painful way. As part of a standard evaluation, patients are given a series of tests: a tympanogram, to determine how the eardrums respond to air pressure; an assessment of the cochlea's response to sound; and a standard audiogram, to test the frequency and intensity of sounds that define the span of hearing. Although my eardrums functioned well, Stocking said, the last two tests showed signs common to hearing loss at high frequencies, usually owing to age and noise trauma.

The audiologists at the Buffalo clinic see between a hundred and fifty and two hundred tinnitus patients a year, nearly all of them referred by physicians because the noise is disrupting their lives. Last May, David Nowak, a sixty-four-year-old retired machine repairman, had an ear infection that his doctor treated with antibiotics. Shortly thereafter, he heard a loud horn in the street, and has been plagued by tinnitus ever since. "It's so loud that I can't drown it out," he told me. "It is a high-pitched squeal most of the time." Nowak said that, before the tinnitus, "I didn't have a care in the world—I cut the grass and I played with my granddaughter." Now, he said, "My life has come to a halt. I can't do anything. I can't concentrate." One Sunday, he told me, he went out and stood by a metal flagpole during a storm, hoping that lightning would strike, and that he had gone to the cemetery and "begged my mother to take me. I wish I would pass away."

Tinnitus may have been described as early as the Seventeenth Dynasty, in Egypt (1650-1532 B.C.): an ancient Egyptian text, the Medical Book from Crocodilopolis (circa 150 B.C.), contains references to a "humming in the ear." Treatment involved pouring herbs, oil, frankincense, tree sap, and soil into the ear using a reed stalk. The earliest undisputed description of the condition comes from Hippocrates, who used three words to describe the problem: *echos*, meaning sound; *bombos*, denoting buzzing; and *psophos*, indicating a slight sound. (Our word "tinnitus" derives from the Latin *tinnire*, meaning to ring.)

LAURENT CILLUFFO



Tinnitus is one of the most common clinical conditions in the United States.

The Greco-Roman therapy ranged from holding one's breath in an effort to expel offending humors from the ear to placing honey, vinegar, cucumber juice, and radish extract in the ear. Hippocrates did make an observation that serves as the foundation for modern therapy: "Why is it that the buzzing in the ear ceases if one makes a sound? Is it because the greater sound drives out the less?"

In the modern era, people with tinnitus were thought to be suffering from anxiety or delusion, or to be subject to the transmission of spontaneous impulses from the nerve within the ear. Researchers have only recently begun to explore the neurological basis for tinnitus. Richard Salvi, a professor at the University of Buffalo, is one of the leading experts in the field. As a graduate student at Upstate Medical Center, in Syracuse, Salvi had set out to identify the "neurological signature" for tinnitus by treating rats and mice with drugs that injured the auditory nerve; conventional wisdom held that, after damage to the hearing apparatus in the inner ear, increased output from the cochlea would create the constant ringing or buzzing sound perceived as tinnitus. Salvi recalled, "Instead of seeing hyperactivity, which was the prevailing opinion about tinnitus, it was just the opposite. Output would actually slow down. You had a severely deafened animal, and nothing coming out of the inner ear—no spontaneous activity at all."

Salvi moved to the University of Buffalo in 1987. He had begun to consider a new theory, in which hyperactivity originated in the central nervous system rather than in the inner ear. He collaborated with Dr. Alan Lockwood, a neurologist at the University of Buffalo. "Initially, we were going to do images of the brains of people who are normal and people with tinnitus," Salvi recalled. "But when you are doing any sort of brain-imaging project what you have is all the other confounding variables"—such as age, gender, and head size. Shortly after Salvi's arrival, he met with a group of local residents who had formed a tinnitus support group. One person, Salvi recalled, got up and

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2

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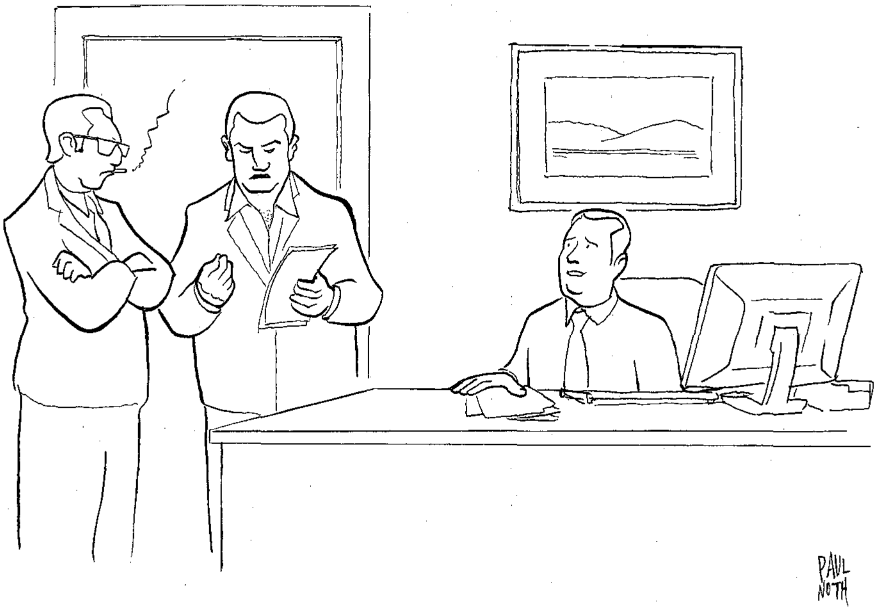
said, " 'Dr. Salvi, I stick my tongue out and my tinnitus gets louder.' I looked at the person, and my eyes started to wobble around in my head, and I thought, What's going on with this person?" Then a second person got up and said, "When I clench my jaw, my tinnitus gets quieter." Salvi told me, "A light bulb went off in my head. It seemed like what we should be doing with imaging studies was not comparing normal people to those with tinnitus but, rather, having these people come in and get scanned when their tinnitus was quiet, and then again while doing something like sticking out their tongue, which made it louder. In the same patient we can determine what part of the brain was changing."

The first PET-scan results were unexpected. Whereas a real sound will activate areas on both sides of the brain, "we found a big increase in activity in just one side of the brain," Salvi told me. If the origins of tinnitus were in the ear, it would activate both sides of the brain; when only one side appeared active, it suggested that the tinnitus originated in the central nervous system. The brain became hyperactive in an effort to compensate for the reduced input, generating phantom sounds. This conclusion, which was published in the journal *Neurology* in 1998, began to change the way that researchers approached tinnitus. Still, there is no convincing explanation for why only one side of the brain shows activity in people with tinnitus, particularly since it doesn't appear consistently on either the right or the left side.

Another oddity is a type of tinnitus called "gaze-evoked," in which ringing in the ears is occasioned or worsened by moving one's eyes to the right or left, or up or down. Case studies reported gaze-evoked tinnitus in patients who had had a tumor on the auditory nerve which was surgically removed. "The patient goes completely deaf in that ear, and then he starts hearing the phantom sound of tinnitus in the ear which is deaf," Salvi explained. "The ear isn't even connected to the brain anymore." When patients with gaze-evoked tinnitus were given PET scans, some showed activity in the angular gyrus, an area of the brain near the auditory cortex; others had activity in the brain stem. "The bottom line was that you perceive tinnitus in your deaf ear but there is no nerve there, no input," he went on. "So it has to come from various parts of the brain."

Jean-Luc Puel, a professor of neuroscience in Montpellier, France, is not convinced that tinnitus always originates as a phantom sound in the brain. He has studied rats and guinea pigs that were treated with high doses of aspirin or exposed to noise trauma. Puel believes that glutamate, a neurotransmitter, is inappropriately processed in the



"With these credit-default swaps, I never know whose legs I'm supposed to break."

cochlea, which causes abnormal impulses from the acoustic nerve, and that by infusing the animal's ear with a drug that blocks the action of glutamate he can reduce the tinnitus. More broadly, Puel argues that the disorder may have multiple causes. "This conflict between peripheral and central origin of tinnitus is simplistic," he said. "To have perception of tinnitus, which is subjective, you need a brain." Puel allows that his view is contrarian, adding, "I like to arrive at scientific meetings and disturb people." But he also believes that different causes of tinnitus may reflect differences in biology. "There is no one type of tinnitus," he told me.

When I visited Salvi's laboratories, Edward Lobarinas, a researcher, was conducting experiments on rats that had been subjected to acoustic trauma. Lobarinas showed me a Plexiglas platform with an embedded pressure sensor attached to a computer. On top of the Plexiglas was a metal mesh canopy. First, a normal rat that served as a control was caged under the canopy and the entire apparatus was placed inside an acoustic chamber, into which Lobarinas delivered a steady noise with a narrow frequency range. "It's a continual sound in the background, a sort of *sh-h-h*," he said. This was interrupted by a loud bang. "The animal startles," he said, and this sent a measurement of the movement through the pressure sensor to the computer screen, which showed a sharp spike.

In the next step, the sudden bang was preceded by a silent gap in the noise. This time, the rat had a much smaller startle reflex, seen on the computer as a low peak. "When you have a silent gap before the loud noise, you're less startled," Lobarinas said. "It's like when it's dark and you're in your room and a bogeyman jumps out at you. You have a maximum startle. But if, before the bogeyman jumps out, the door is slowly creaking open, you sort of know the bogeyman is going to come out, and that decreases your startle."

When a rat with induced hearing loss underwent the same experiment, it had a robust startle reflex even when the loud noise was preceded by silence. "The rat has tinnitus," Lobarinas said. "It can't tell us, of course, but it has constant buzzing in the ear, and we know that although it hears, it doesn't perceive the silent gap because of tinnitus. So its startle reflex is not attenuated. It doesn't hear the door slowly creaking open, just the bogeyman."

Total funding for tinnitus research in the United States has recently been little more than three million dollars. "People don't realize how complicated tinnitus really is," Salvi said. "It's in the same league as epilepsy and many neurological disorders. But so little money is spent on it, so there is almost no scientific database you can build on."

Perry Jefferies, now a forty-eight-year-old retired Army first sergeant, entered Iraq with the 4th Infantry Division in April, 2003, as part of the initial invasion of Operation Iraqi Freedom. "We moved from Kuwait to Baghdad," he told me, when we spoke by phone, "and then went up to Tikrit, until we were posted at the Iran border." Jefferies escorted and resupplied units moving into battle. After one firefight, as his convoy was evacuating an injured Iraqi soldier, U.S. helicopters fired missiles into enemy ammunition bunkers. "We were right there at the explosions," he said. Later, as his convoy was resupplying a unit near the border with Iran, a massive explosion at a nearby Iraqi fort rocked his Humvee. "We think that looters set it off," he said. "It fried the fort."

Although hearing trauma was most intense in combat, Jefferies said, he had been exposed to repeated noise during his many years in the military. During basic training, while on the weapons range, "we only wore one earplug, so you could hear the instructor when he yelled at you." While learning how to fire a .50-calibre gun from an armored personnel carrier, he recalled, "we had no hearing protection. Afterwards, blood was coming out of one of my ears." He had ruptured his right eardrum. Even so, the close-range explosion at the fort was different from anything he had experienced before. "I felt like I was under water for a few minutes," he said. Since that time, he has been afflicted with tinnitus. "It is a high, steady electronic tone," he told me. "And my ears feel heavy and blocked."

As a first sergeant, Jefferies acted as

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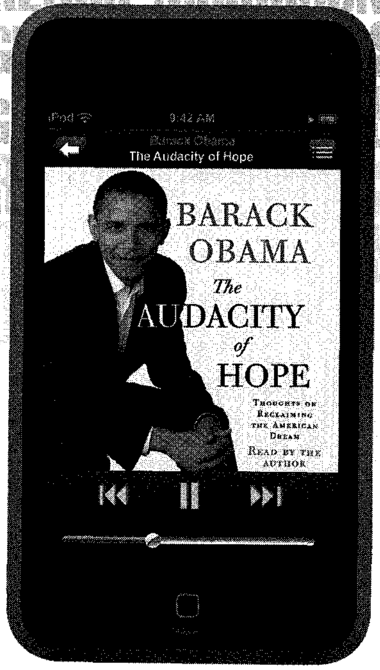

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an adviser to soldiers during their deployment. "One of my jobs was to try to find answers," he said. "But I don't remember any discussion about hearing protection." The soldiers in his unit were required to carry earplugs, but many of them would simply attach the case to the front of their protective vests. "I had to listen sometimes to three different radios in the Humvee and respond," Jefferies went on. No one, he told me, wore hearing protection, even when machine guns were test-fired on the base. In 2004, Jefferies retired from active service and was awarded the Bronze Star and the Legion of Merit.

Jefferies's hearing fluctuates, at times diminishing to thirty-five per cent below normal, and he is now receiving ten-per-cent disability compensation for tinnitus. He is active in the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America and works as a blood-donor recruiter at Robertson Blood Center, at Fort Hood, in Texas. "It is hard to hear in a bar or restaurant, hard to discern certain words, and I have to turn up the TV," he told me. At times, the high-pitched drone of his tinnitus wakes him in the middle of the night.

A recent report from the Department of Veterans Affairs estimated that nearly seventy thousand of the 1.3 million soldiers who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan are collecting disability for tinnitus, and more than fifty-eight thousand are on disability for hearing loss. In 2006, the V.A. reportedly spent five hundred and thirty-nine million dollars on payments to veterans with tinnitus. A survey of more than a hundred and forty-one thousand Army active-duty, reserve, and Guard members who were examined in audiology clinics from April, 2003, through March, 2004, showed that tinnitus accounted for more than thirty per cent of post-deployment-related diagnoses. The study, from the U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine, concluded, "There were not adequate supplies of earplugs to fit all deploying soldiers. There was also failure of an Army medical readiness automation system . . . to provide unit commanders with information regarding troops having adequate hearing protec-

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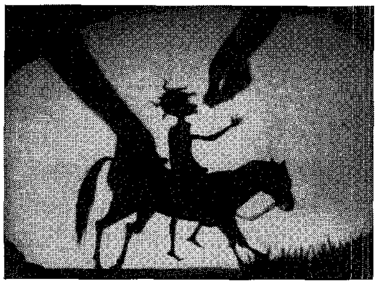

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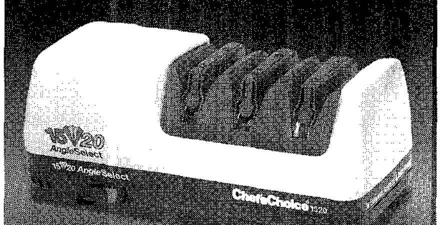

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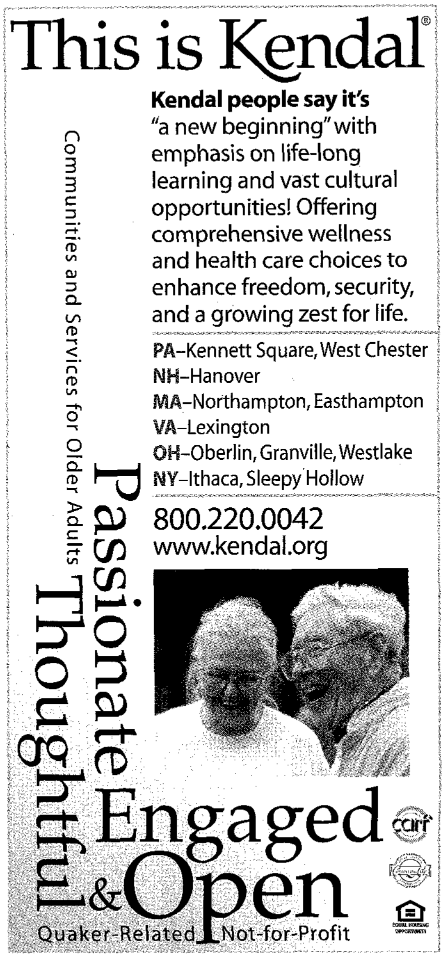
tion. . . . Finally, there is evidence . . . that soldiers having blast injuries may not have been referred to audiology for adequate evaluation and treatment." As with body armor and protective shielding on Humvees, the Pentagon had failed to anticipate the kind of hearing-protection devices that were needed. Even soldiers who were provided with earplugs were given insufficient instruction in their use; mistakenly believing that the earplugs could interfere with low-frequency sounds, like whispered commands during search-and-destroy operations, many chose not to use them.

Theresa Schulz, an audiologist who served in the military for twenty-one years, told me that hearing loss accompanying tinnitus is now the No. 1 cause of disability among veterans of the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. "I think it's probably because of the nature of urban warfare," she said, given that gunfire and mortar and grenade explosions occur in relatively confined and often closed areas. After Schulz left the military, she worked for the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, in the field of hearing conservation among workers, and she is now employed in the private sector, developing devices that can protect against noise trauma. For civilians, Schulz noted, extraordinary noise like construction blasts or jackhammering can often be anticipated and protected against, but "in the military that's not the case. It can come up anytime."

In the fall of 2004, in an article for *Hearing Health* titled "Troops Return with Alarming Rates of Hearing Loss," Schulz wrote, "Unfortunately, the resources required to accomplish the hearing conservation mission throughout the armed forces are diminishing just as the problem worsens." Positions for active-duty audiologists, Schulz noted, were quickly being eliminated; since 1990, these positions had dwindled from seventy-three to twenty-five, with six more posts expected to be eliminated in the coming years. Meanwhile, Schulz wrote, "In the Army . . . only forty-six per cent of those soldiers who require an annual hearing evaluation—because they are exposed to hazardous noise as a part of their routine duties—received one last year."

The military has attempted to make hearing protection more widely available. The combat-arms earplug currently in use was originally developed in France, in the late nineteen-nineties, and contains a unique acoustic filter that is about the size of a grain of rice. The filter creates acoustic friction to capture potentially harmful sound waves and turn them around, so that the noise doesn't send signals into the ear canal. Schulz described it as low-end, explaining, "It's basically just a fairly traditional earplug that has a filter in it, that allows through most of the sounds that you would normally hear," while blocking sharper noises, like gunfire. A more sophisticated device, called QuietPro, is a lightweight digital tactical-communication headset with high-level hearing protection. Continuous low-frequency rumbling noises above eighty-five decibels, such as those produced by helicopters and armored vehicles, are attenuated by more than thirty decibels. Outer microphones amplify surrounding sound, but very loud impact noises from I.E.D.s are instantly blocked by a digital processor; normal amplification is restored immediately after the impact sound has passed. "It's essentially a hearing aid and a hearing protector in one," Schulz said. "It's a device that allows you to turn up the sound so that you can hear what's on the other side of a door, what's around the corner. . . . It basically shuts down and protects you during the blast and then comes back on so that you can hear what's going on after the blast." The Marines have adopted the QuietPro, but the Army and the Air Force, Schulz said, are taking a "wait-and-see approach," particularly since each QuietPro unit costs about a thousand dollars. But, Schulz noted, hearing loss and tinnitus can prevent soldiers from being redeployed and qualifies as a disability. "It's one of those pay-me-now, pay-me-later" situations, Schulz said. "Pay-me-now is really less."

Colonel Kathy Gates, the director of the Army Audiology and Speech Center in Washington, D.C., serves as the audiology consultant to the Army Surgeon General, working to redesign the hearing program in that branch of the service. In 2004, Gates instituted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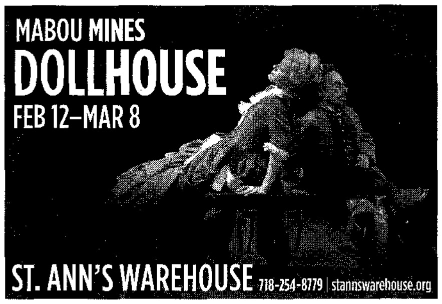
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an annual surveillance hearing test for soldiers about to be deployed, and last year mandated a similar evaluation of those returning from service. All soldiers must now be instructed in the use of the combat-arms earplugs. Gates has helped develop a strategy for persuading Army personnel to wear the earplugs in combat by linking their use to success in battle rather than to long-term health. "A soldier with hearing loss is impaired in battle," Gates said. "We are linking hearing not to quality of life per se but to survivability and completion of the mission." Gates said that QuietPro is being field-tested in Iraq and Afghanistan, and that the Army had increased the number of positions for audiologists in the battle theatre and in regional hospitals in Iraq. Even so, recruitment was slow, and the military is not yet fully staffed despite the restoration of funding for the hearing program.

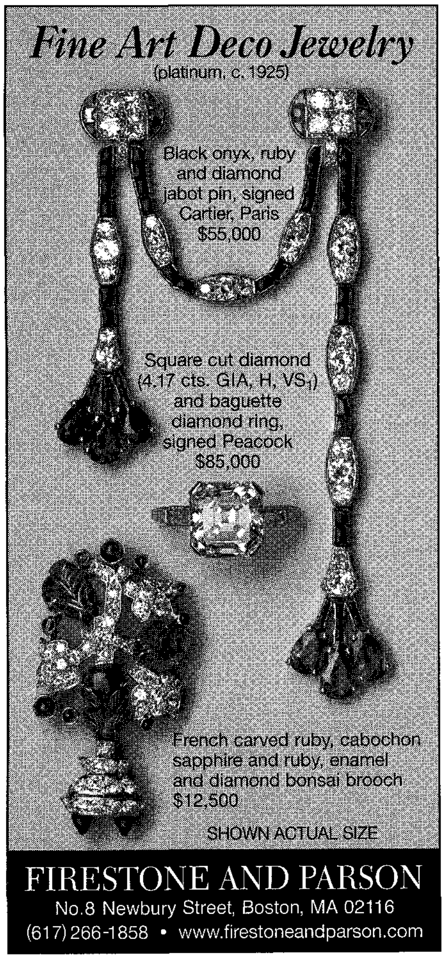
The efforts to provide proper training and equipment have had some success. Specialist Joseph McLosky, who is twenty-four, is a member of the military-police reserve; in September, 2006, his unit was sent to Fort Dix to prepare for urban combat, and he was issued the newly requisitioned combat-arms earplugs. Two-sided and color-coded (the green side for use when actively shooting—on a range, for instance—and the yellow side for missions), the earplugs, McLosky said, were to be used in addition to the radio headsets that soldiers wear in convoys. "A lot of guys thought it was ridiculous to use both," he told me, when we spoke in September.

In December, 2006, McLosky was deployed to the city of Bayji, between Baghdad and Mosul, in the north of the country, to train Iraqi police recruits in the use of firearms, surveillance missions, and the pursuit of insurgents. "We went from police station to police station along the same roads, spending eight to sixteen hours a day in the convoy," he said. They encountered about one I.E.D. a week. In June, 2007, his squad was passing a checkpoint when a car bomb exploded. "Dirt and smoke and debris were flying past my head," he went on. "We had been up all night, and I thought I was dreaming." Although he was only a few yards away from the explosion, McLosky said, "My ears weren't ringing." In October, an I.E.D. detonated underneath McLosky's truck. "I was ejected from the vehicle," he said. "It broke my pelvis, left leg, and ankle. I had to have my left foot amputated." Despite the severity of his injuries, McLosky emerged with his hearing intact; he now plans to become a physical therapist. Throughout his deployment, McLosky told me, it had been easy to tell which soldiers weren't wearing their earplugs. "They were the ones saying, 'What? What?' "

Tinnitus patients desperate for relief sometimes turn to folk remedies. Christina Stocking routinely hears of patients using herbal supplements like ginkgo biloba or high doses of Vitamin B, neither of which has been proved effective in large controlled studies. Antioxidants are commonly recommended—because the aging process is believed to be related in part to oxidized damage to tissues, including the auditory nerve—although no practical benefit has been documented. Some of the more extreme approaches that Stocking has encountered include the neti pot, a device that resembles a teapot with a long spout; the device is filled with warm salt water and used to irrigate the nasal passages. "You get yourself into a position to pour up one nostril, and it gets up to your sinus and drains out the other side," Stocking explained. Another is "ear candling," she told me. "People actually take wax paper, roll it up, stick one end into the ear canal, and light the other end."

Stocking trained under Pawel Jastreboff, now a professor at Emory University, who developed a treatment plan called tinnitus retraining therapy. It combines counselling, to reduce the anxiety caused by the phantom sounds, with sound therapy, using a neutral background noise. Stocking first determined the decibel level of my tinnitus, then transmitted a noise similar to rushing water to both ears through headphones. For the first time in a year, I couldn't hear the dental drill even when I tried.

The device currently approved by the F.D.A. for tinnitus treatment, produced by a company called Neuromonics, resembles an MP3 player. I put the earbuds in and listened to a soothing piece of classical music. "That is meant to induce relaxation," Stocking explained, a key component of the tinnitus management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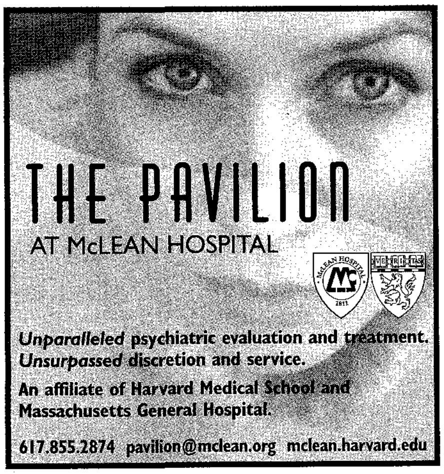
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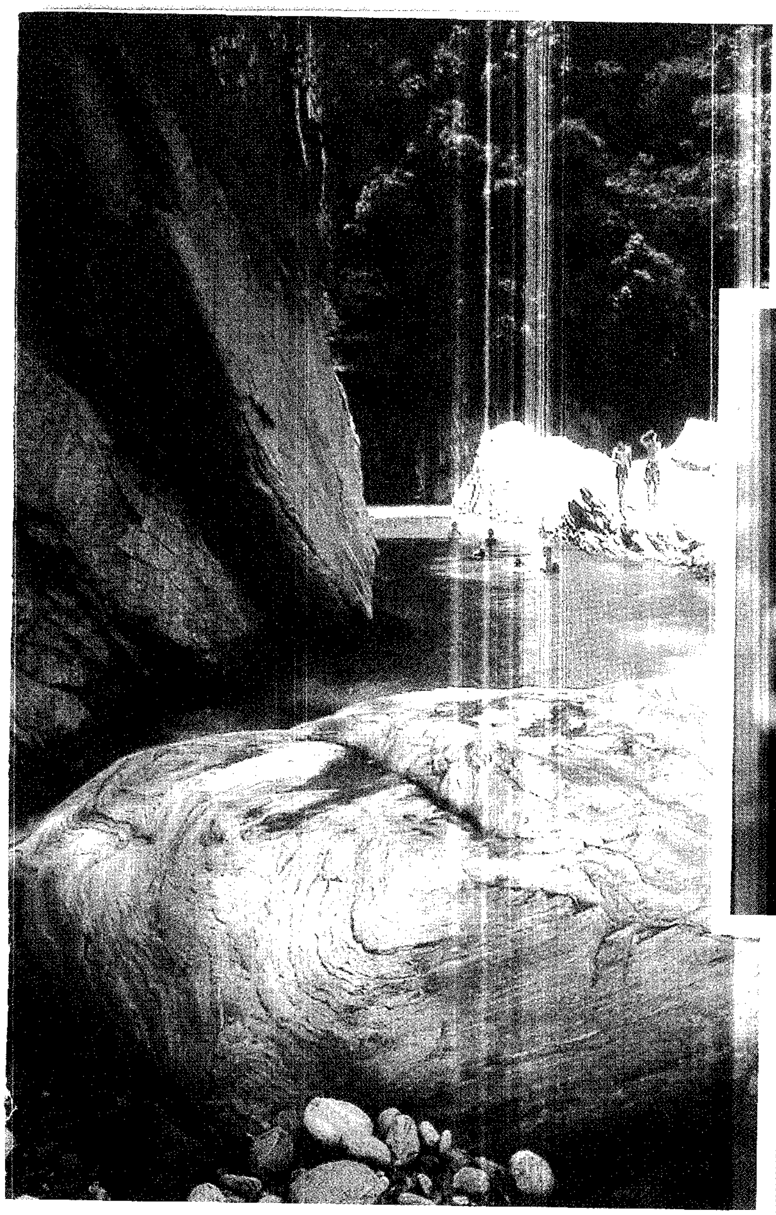
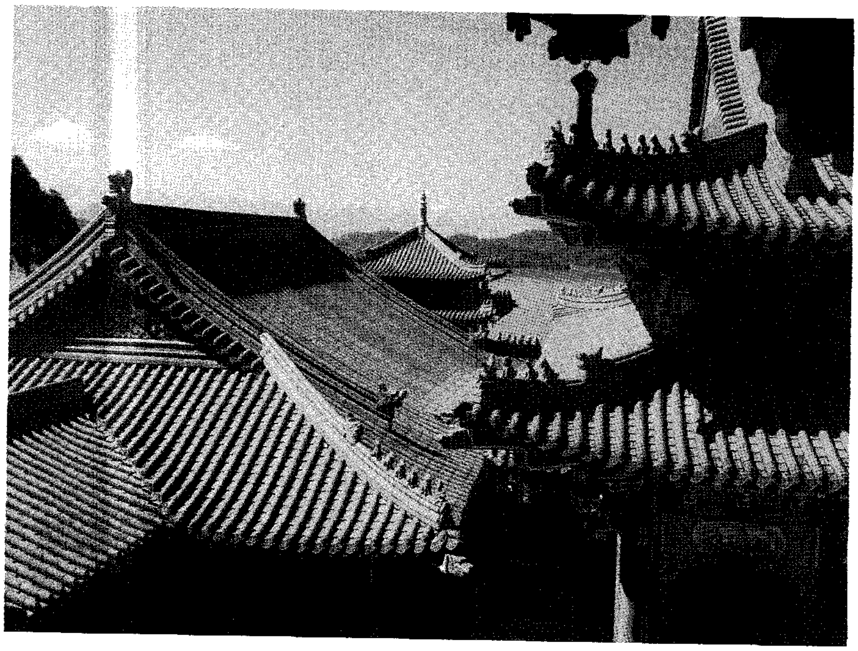


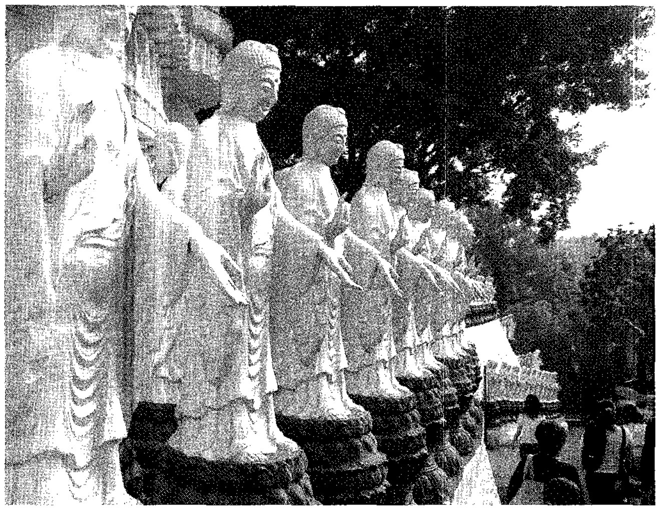
Welcome to Taiwan

Travel expert Rudy Maxa reports from Taiwan in the first of a six-part series on the island nation, whose reputation for having one of the most majestic landscapes east of the Himalayas continues to grow.

WITH TWO-THIRDS of the island of Taiwan claimed by verdant mountains where steam still hisses from dormant volcanoes and giant marble boulders appear to have been strewn by giants, visitors may be forgiven for losing themselves in its impressive natural attributes and forgetting that Taiwan is also one of the most densely populated places on earth.

You need only spend an evening strolling through the night markets of its vibrant capital city of Taipei or browsing the designer stores in one of the world's tallest skyscrapers to begin to appreciate that nearly twenty-three million people live on the 14,000-square-mile main island. Then take the sleek bullet train at 186 miles per hour along the heavily populated west coast of Taiwan, heading south from Taipei toward the beach





resorts at the southern tip of the sweet-potato-shaped island, which is only about a hundred miles off the coast of mainland China. Out the train's windows will flash a string of towns punctuated by shrimp farms, emerald rice fields, papaya plantations, and groves of banana trees.

And while the country is rightfully known for its high-tech industry, which manufactures many of the world's computers and gadgets, visitors who explore further will also find Taiwan in the incense-scented smoke of its Buddhist temples, the fragrance of its teahouses, the warmth of its mineral-spring baths, and the galleries of its premier urban attraction for visitors—the stunning National Palace Museum in Taipei, which houses a treasure trove of art and antiquities.

It was sixteenth-century Portuguese sailors who were so captivated by the lush island that they dubbed it "Ilha Formosa," or "beautiful island." Following the Portuguese, the Dutch, the Spanish, and the Japanese each took turns building their forts there. A smattering of German traders and British sailors eyed Taiwan enviously, and in the eighteen-hundreds, Commodore Matthew Perry argued for Formosa to become an American protectorate.

Yet it wasn't the Europeans who had first discovered Taiwan. For thousands of years, indigenous people were there living off the land and sea. Today they make up two per cent of the population and mainly live in communities tucked in the Central Mountain Range, which runs like a spine down the length of Taiwan. There's a resurging interest to promote the customs, architecture, and languages of Taiwan's fourteen recognized aboriginal tribes.

Nearly eighty-five per cent of Taiwan's population considers itself Taiwanese. This group largely includes the Hakka, who hail from the Chinese province of Guangdong and who began emigrating to Taiwan in the eighteenth century. Another fourteen per cent traces its roots to the two million mainland Chinese who came to Taiwan in 1949, fleeing the grasp of Mao Tse-tung and the Communist military.

Today Taiwan is one of the original "Asian Tigers" (countries distinguished by their rapid economic growth in the eighties and nineties, their emphasis on education, and successful industry). As one of the standouts of East Asia, Taiwan is internationally known for its hospitality to visitors as well as its architecture, culture, and cuisine, shaped by the diverse people who populate what remains a most beautiful island.

Rudy Maxa is the host and executive producer of the public television series "Rudy Maxa's World."

Taiwan 2009 Festivals Calendar

Rooted in Taoism, Buddhism, or folk traditions, major Taiwanese festivals appeal to deities and ancestors for good fortune, bountiful harvests, or peace. Celebrations are based on the lunar calendar, so actual dates vary annually.

LANTERN FESTIVAL (February 9th)
Colorful lanterns decorate the close of Taiwan's New Year festivities. In Taipei, the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial displays a gigantic lantern in the shape of the year's zodiac animal. In Kaohsiung, lantern exhibits line the banks of the Love River.

MATZU'S BIRTHDAY (April 18th)
Taiwan celebrates the birth of Matzu, goddess of the sea, with incense-scented ceremonies. A weeklong pilgrimage begins in Dajia, where multitudes escort Matzu with dance, music, and fireworks.

HAKKA TUNG BLOSSOM FESTIVAL (mid-April to May)
In spring, as the Tung tree blooms with white petals that fall to the ground like snow, Taipei celebrates Hakka culture with music and dance, flower crafts, and Hakka cuisine.

DRAGON BOAT FESTIVAL (May 28th)
According to legend, this festival originated with the poet Qu Yuan's death in the Hunan Province's Miluo River. The search for him with many boats evolved into today's vibrant dragon-boat races.

TAIWAN CULINARY EXHIBITION (August 20th–23rd)
Taiwan's largest food festival presents Taiwanese and Chinese cuisine in traditional and innovative ways—from "silk baby" spring rolls to "sour and salty pagoda" (pork slices stacked like temples).

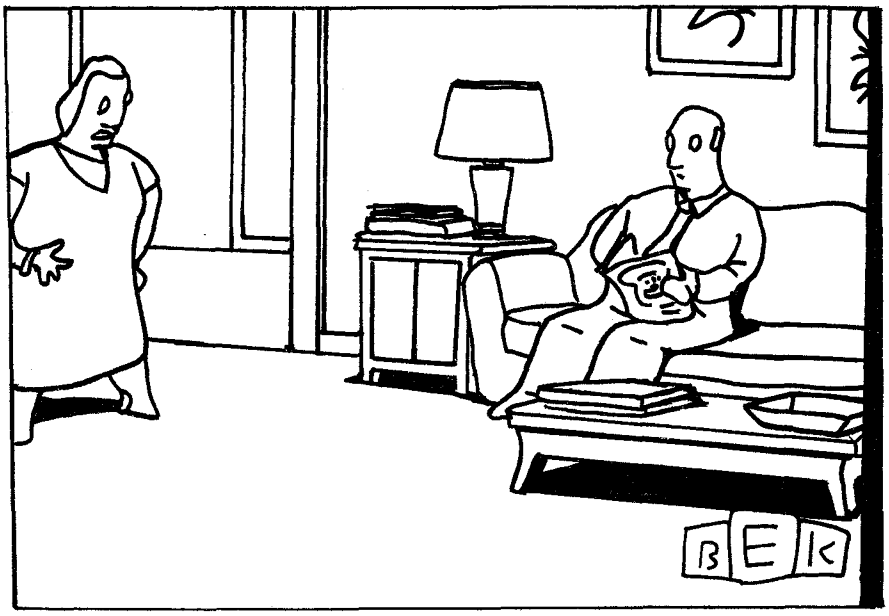
GHOST MONTH (August 20th–September 18th)
During this time, when ghosts leave the netherworld, families offer symbolic items to wandering ancestors and launch water lanterns to guide their spirits.

MID-AUTUMN FESTIVAL (October 3rd)
Celebrating the end of the harvest, residents eat pomelos (for protection) and moon cakes (for togetherness) and stroll under the full moon.

For more information on Taiwan,
visit **WWW.GO2TAIWAN.NET**

Touch Your Heart

IMAGES, PREVIOUS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: SHAKADANG STREAM IN TAROKO GORGE COURTESY OF TAIWAN TOURISM; KAPOK BLOSSOMS ALONG TAIPEI RAPID TRANSIT ROUTE ©DANIEL M. SHIH; BUILDING FAÇADE IN LU-KANG ©DANBURG MURMUR; WENWU TEMPLE ON SUN MOON LAKE ©RONALD C. FLORES, SR. *THIS PAGE:* BUDDHA STATUES, FO GUANG SHAN MONASTERY ©RUDY MAXA



"We're not friends—she just e-mails me things I'm not interested in."

• •

strategy. Then I noticed a soft white noise that was programmed to mask my own tinnitus. Again, within moments, the tinnitus was gone. The theory, elaborated by Jastreboff, is that when more sounds are fed to the brain sensitivity and spontaneous activity decline—the effect Hippocrates remarked upon.

A simple hearing aid may reduce some tinnitus by amplifying background noises, but other strategies include using sounds in the environment, like soft background music from a stereo or more directed sounds that come from a fan or a small desktop sound machine. Similarly, a device called a sound generator, which is worn on the ear, can supply a white noise that partially interferes with the tinnitus. "It really provides a sense of relief and control over the tinnitus," Stocking said. "Patients feel they are able to do something about it. And, by providing additional sound, it seems to bring down the sensitivity of the auditory system."

Recently, I met with Dr. David Vernick, an ear-nose-and-throat specialist at my hospital, Beth Israel Deaconess. He reviewed the tests done in Buffalo and concurred that I needed hearing aids. "They will certainly help you with what you are missing now," he said. "It's hard to know how much benefit you will get with regard to your tinnitus." He added that hearing aids often act simply as a placebo.

Ann Stockwell, an audiologist in Vernick's office, entered the data from my audiogram into a computer, then used earbuds to transmit sounds generated by the computer—in essence, programming the hearing aids. I listened to a range of tones, which Stockwell compared with the data provided by the audiogram. Once the hearing aids were fitted, she asked me to turn my back. From about sixteen feet away, she spoke in a normal voice that I heard with no difficulty. "The aids will amplify background sounds, like the noise from the refrigerator or a heater," she said. "Initially, there will be increased sensory awareness, and then you will adapt. I like to say that we are entering the auditory closet and throwing out what the brain can't hear. We will fill the closet with a new set of sounds. And, hopefully, your brain will change so that there is less tinnitus."

The hearing aids aren't a cure: in a quiet room, my tinnitus is as persistent as ever. But when I returned to my office, with the hearing aids in place, I could hear the noise of the air vents, which previously had been inaudible. I tried to catch the high-pitched drone that has accompanied me in the past year. I couldn't hear it. ♦

SARAH LAWRENCE

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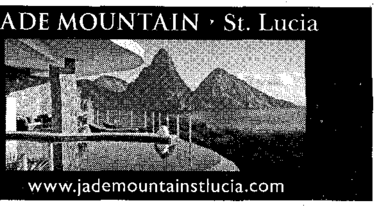

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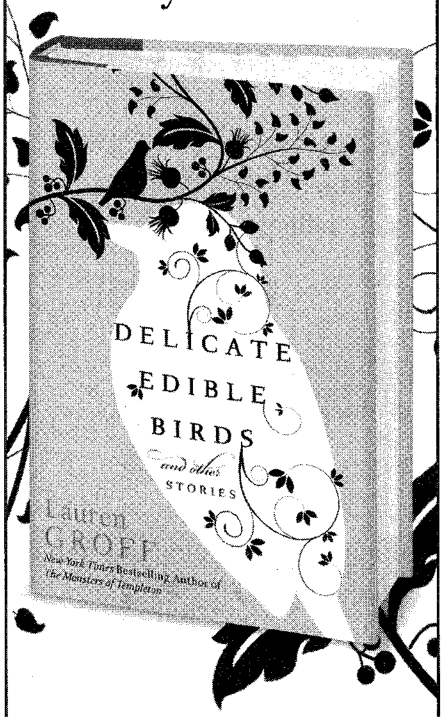
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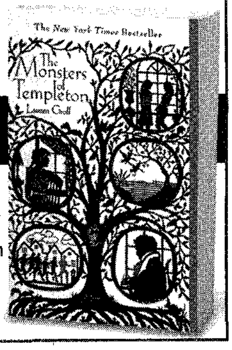

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LETTER FROM CHINA

THE PROMISED LAND

Guangzhou's Canaan market and the rise of an African merchant class.

BY EVAN OSNOS

Joseph Nwaosu, a Nigerian exporter, has yet to acclimate to the winter damp of Guangzhou, on China's southern coast. Over a button-down shirt he usually adds a heavy brown turtleneck sweater and a rumpled tan parka; when necessary, he wears a wool hat. The layers help with his commute. From his apartment, which has a mattress on the floor and rents for forty dollars a month, it takes an hour by bus and a half hour on foot to reach his office, across the street from the Canaan Export Clothes Trading Center, a half-lit market painted a dusty shade of peach. Almost all its customers are merchants from Nigeria, Mali, Ghana, and other African countries. They are arriving in such large numbers that in November Kenya Airways inaugurated mainland China's first non-stop route from Africa, between Nairobi and Guangzhou. Since the Canaan market opened, six years ago, similar markets, filled with African buyers and Chinese sellers, have arisen along the same block. Taxi-drivers call the neighborhood Chocolate City.

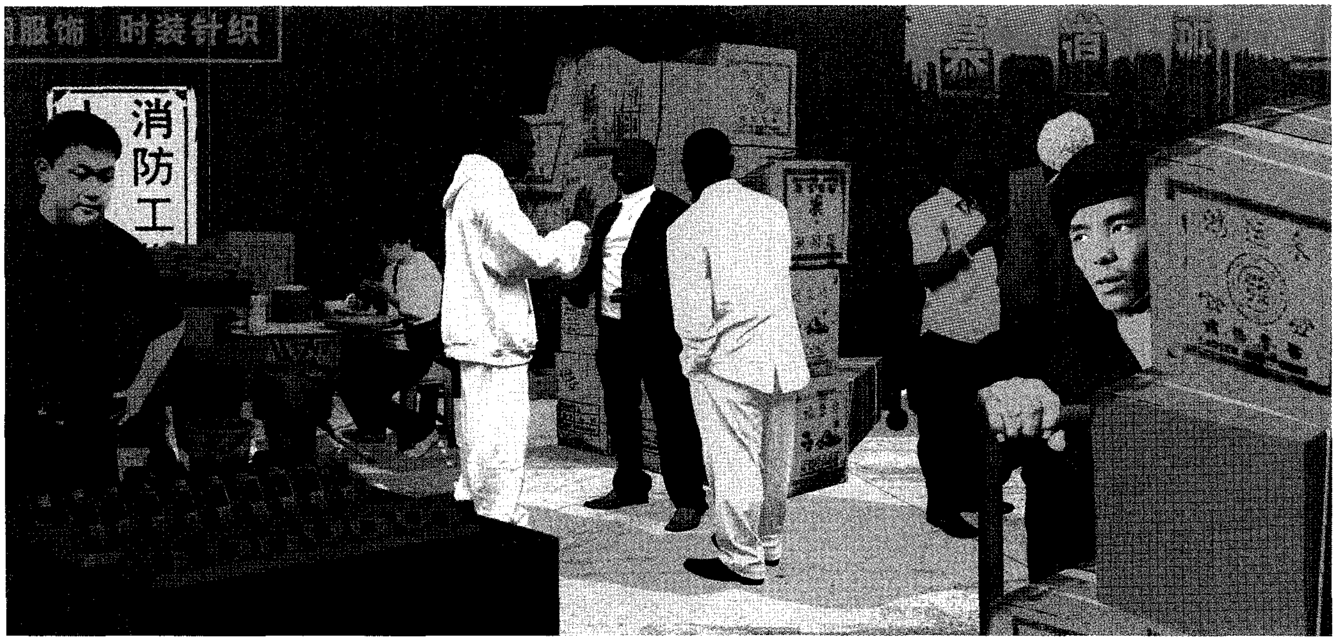
The Canaan market opens onto Guangyuan West Road—eight roaring lanes of cars and trucks and scooters on the ground and four more lanes in the air, on concrete spans that block the rain and the sun. Every square foot has been claimed by commerce. Walking to and from work, Nwaosu (I have changed his name) traverses a sidewalk offering a sharpening stone for cleavers, a handheld sewing machine, a mobile-phone card for Africa, an hour of sex, a bundle of socks, an electronic songbird that sings, an eight ball of cocaine, a mold that makes the perfect dumpling. Lining the sidewalks are passport-photo booths, mobile-phone venders, and shops crammed with jeans and T-shirts, alligator-skin cap-toe shoes and made-to-measure suits, soccer jerseys and bulletproof vests (four hundred and ten dollars for blue nylon; five hundred and fifty-six dollars for camouflage). But the real business goes on inside, where merchants cut deals for bogus and factory-reject Prada and Lacoste and Polo. The Canaan economy is all cash and unhindered by borders: "one hundred per cent human hair" extensions are clipped from heads in India, braided by hand in China, and packed for sale in West Africa. The man selling them was, until recently, trading motorbike parts in Singapore, and if the hair business slows down he will move on again. All of Canaan seems determined to get somewhere else.

Nwaosu, at twenty-nine, is spindle thin, with a wary flicker in his eyes. He works out of a tiny, windowless office above a strip of clothing stalls a few hundred feet from the original market. "When I arrived in Guangzhou, this was the first place I came," he said one recent afternoon. Outside the open office door, a stereo was thumping, and someone was straining to seal an overstuffed container of clothes. Inside, ducts and wires slumped from an open ceiling. On one wall—a metal garage door—someone had scrawled a phone number for take-out. The other walls had been covered in leopard-print contact paper. The sole decoration was a large calendar featuring a smiling young Nigerian priest. It had a Scripture citation for every date and an exhortation across the top: "READ THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR!"

Nwaosu's glasses, metal-framed and often askew, give him a professorial aspect that is rare in the world of the traders. He did not set out to be a businessman in Guangzhou. He had always planned to be a priest. His parents were teachers, with eight children. He studied philosophy at Imo State University, in the Igbo country of southeastern Nigeria. When he was twenty, he joined the seminary. But he developed kidney problems that left him tired and in pain. Because the work of a priest is physically demanding, the seminary asked him to withdraw. "I was devastated," he told me.

He had little confidence in Nigerian

hospitals, and doctors told him that treatment would cost at least ten thousand dollars. "But my family couldn't pay that," he said. "I felt like I was going to die the next day. For a whole year, I had no money—I had no bills, no copper. I wrote to the Ford Foundation. But they said they only help groups, not individuals. So I decided I will help myself."



The neighborhood around Canaan draws thousands of aspiring immigrant entrepreneurs. Taxi-drivers call it Chocolate City.

JOHN RITTER

A friend lent Nwaosu cash to buy a mobile-phone card, and he and his sister began charging people to make calls. They moved up to selling the cards, and by the spring of 2006 he had saved enough to consider going abroad. "At first, I wanted to go to Germany," he said. "But the Embassy wouldn't give me an appointment. I tried Holland, but that didn't work." Getting a Chinese visa was far simpler. He paid more than eight hundred and fifty dollars to an agent in Lagos, and a month later he boarded an airplane for the first time in his life, bound for Beijing. When he landed, he hailed a taxi, but he did not know to ask for the meter to be turned on. "It should have been thirty yuan. He charged me four hundred and fifty," he said.

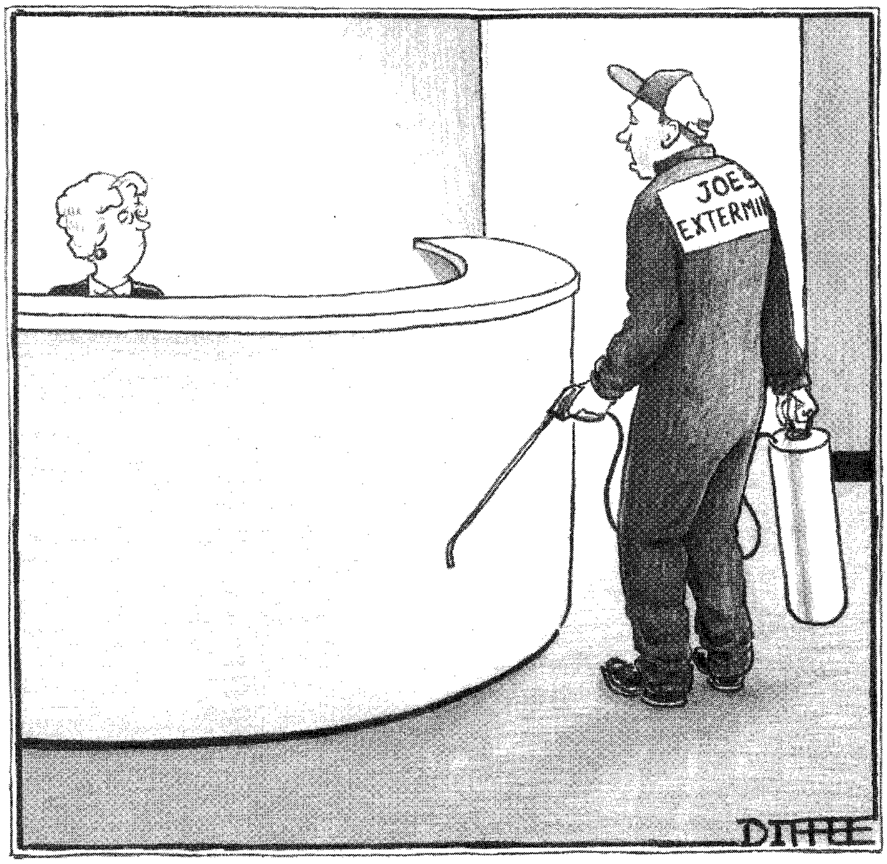
Medical care in China was inexpensive, and Nwaosu was successfully treated for his ailment, but when he was unable to make a living in Beijing he headed south to Guangzhou, the trading port formerly known as Canton. He had nothing but the scribbled number of a stranger—a soft-spoken Nigerian trader who had arrived four months earlier. "He taught me the nature of the place," Nwaosu said. "The most important thing he taught me was to believe in myself—and to believe in God, too."

For his first deal at Canaan, Nwaosu ordered two thousand dollars' worth of computer components to be delivered to his sister, who would sell them in Lagos. When the shipment was delivered, he learned why a trader should not pay for goods without examining them first. They were the wrong parts; he couldn't give them away. "I felt the whole world was collapsing," he said. "All my savings had vanished. How was I going to pay for food? I was stranded again. Some days I didn't eat anything."

He tried his luck in the DVD business, a popular niche around Canaan, where stalls have pirated-movie catalogues as thick as phone books. Traders can buy movies for thirty-four cents each. "With a thousand-dollar investment, we could get a return of threefold," he said. "It wasn't much, but it was enough to get started."

In the ecosystem of the market, Nwaosu is a hustler—a word with largely positive connotations in Canaan patois, a patchwork of English, French, Chinese, Igbo, and other African languages. He spends part of his time canvassing stalls for bargains and haggling with factories. His office is not strictly his; he borrows space in a small freight-forwarding company, taking turns with other traders at a single desk, sharing a computer, a calculator, and a Kleenex dispenser. In return for the use of the office, he pays the company to ship his freight, under a system of patronage with roots in Nigeria. On the day of my visit, Nwaosu fingered the keys of the calculator like worry beads. Around him lay great mounds of plastic bags, smothered in tape and scrawled with phone numbers. All day, men drifted in and out, adding more bundles to the pile. The freight-forwarding company ships big or small, retail or wholesale, a single cell phone or a carpet-size roll of leather to be sliced into shoes and handbags. When I asked Nwaosu what he is allowed to ship from China to Africa, he said, "Anything—as long as it's not contraband."

Every Sunday afternoon, Nwaosu slips out of the market and takes the bus across town to the Sacred Heart Stone House Cathedral, a Gothic-style structure, for Mass. It has stained-glass Caucasian saints peering down on a Chinese priest and a polyglot flock. The three-thirty service is the only English Mass of the week, and in the past few years the crowd has become almost entirely African. Hundreds of people squeeze into the pews, hip to hip; others line the walls, crouching on plastic stools. Still more cram the back, and the last arrivals huddle outside the door, hearing snatches of the Gospel and glimpsing a distant altar, where a wooden crucifix is topped with a neon bulb as a halo. After Mass, hun-



"We got a call about a consultant."

dreds of Nigerians repair to a rickety side building for a charismatic prayer service that thunders with drums and guitars. They throw their arms in the air, singing and swaying and speaking in tongues, until long after dark.

Nwaosu rarely ventures far from Canaan or the church. "I don't have much social life," he said. His peers are almost uniformly young, male, and ambitious—"bachelor sojourners," as immigration historians call them. At least nineteen countries are represented among the traders at Canaan, though Nigerians make up nearly half the total, according to surveys. African Muslims are as visible at the Huaisheng Mosque as Christians are at the Stone House Cathedral. The arrivals have established a web of committees on behalf of their home nations and states, to solve disputes and collect money for funerals and weddings. ("Wherever there are ten or twenty Nigerians, they will organize into a committee," a Nigerian businessman told me.) There are now so many committees that they spend part of their time squabbling over which organization is the most powerful. Some issue identification cards to keep track of their people. A summer soccer league helps blow off steam and awards a silver cup to the winning country's team. Some of the migrants have been in China long enough to cultivate the connections to obtain residency permits, and they have brought their families; some of their children have enrolled in Chinese colleges.

For decades, the Chinese courted Africans with Cold War alliances in the name of liberation, but it was capitalism that ultimately aligned their interests. Between 2002 and 2007, Chinese and African trade—mainly oil, timber, copper, and diamonds—increased by about seven hundred per cent, to seventy-three billion dollars, ranking China as Africa's second-largest trading partner, behind the United States. The African population in Guangzhou, the largest city in southern China, began to climb in 1998, when an Asian financial crisis drove African merchants from Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur in search of the next frontier. Between 2000 and 2005, the number of Africans arriving on tourist visas quintupled, to nearly thirty-two thousand. Today, the city is believed to have some twenty thousand African residents, more than the African populations of Beijing and Shanghai combined. They constitute the largest foreign enclave in Guangzhou.

Economic growth brought mounting pressure to accommodate migrants, and in 2004 Chinese authorities unveiled a Chinese green card, which entitled holders to stay for ten years without renewal. But on the day it was announced a spokesman for the ministry in charge made clear that this was no invitation to huddled masses: "China is not a migration-targeted country, and the new regulations are aimed at attracting high-level foreign personnel." Today, China has all but stopped giving Nigerians visas for longer than three months. Most of them can't get residency, so they stay illegally.

The path to legalization remains obscure: Chinese employers and universities, and overseas companies, can sponsor foreigners for renewable residency permits. Independent merchants, such as Nwaosu, struggle to find sponsors. Like many in the African community, he has long overstayed his visa and become, in Chinese police terms, a Triple-Illegal Person—illegal to enter, illegal to reside, and illegal to work. (Last year, local newspapers reported, the number of Triple-Illegal Persons reached ten thousand.)

Around the market, police and immigration raids have become a constant subject of discussion. In an Igbo-language pop song about life in China, a Nigerian singer named Oluaka described the mood: "They are chasing Africans like sheep without a shepherd." Nwaosu prefers to compare police pressure to the weather: "Sometimes it's very hot. Sometimes it's mild. Or it's cold." And yet he has no plans to leave. "When you go to the United States or Europe, there isn't much opportunity. You are going to get a menial job, with barely enough to send home," he said. "But here we don't have jobs. We set ourselves up."

Even so, for all the opportunities that China affords, Nwaosu and his friends nurse a wounded pride that so many men from the great nation of Nigeria should need to settle in China to make a living. "I am proud of my country," he said. "I am proud of my lineage. I want to see my country functioning."

Racism has a long history in China, and in Canaan the Chinese venders often complain that the Africans demand discounts that are too large to leave much profit. "Many of our friends won't do business with the Africans," a hatmaker who operates out of a stall in Canaan told me. "They say it's not worth it."

Apartment buildings have begun to discourage the ethnic "invasion," as one property agent called it, by raising rents and adopting restrictive covenants. (The mistrust is mutual: when a survey asked African traders if they wanted to share communities with the Chinese, more than two-thirds said no.)

Racial typologies in China are rooted in traditional Chinese thought. In the fourth century B.C., the Zuozhuan, a founding historical text, warned, "If he is not of our race, he is sure to have a different mind." Fair skin indicated intelligence and beauty: the princess in the Shijing, China's earliest collection of poems, had fingers "like the blades of the young white grass" and skin "like congealed ointment." Peasants who toiled in the sun were the "black-headed people." As Frank Dikötter writes in "The Discourse of Race in Modern China," dark skin came to signify inferiority. Chinese writers likened Africa to *hundun*, a folkloric primeval chaos. At the turn of the twentieth century, some of China's most reform-minded thinkers embraced scientific racism with the same enthusiasm with which Francis Galton and other Victorian scientists were promoting the new field of eugenics. Kang Youwei, one of China's leading philosophers, described a rigid hierarchy of races, with "white" and "yellow" at the top, and suggested that the "monstrously ugly black" be whitened by changes in diet, intermarriage, and sterilization.

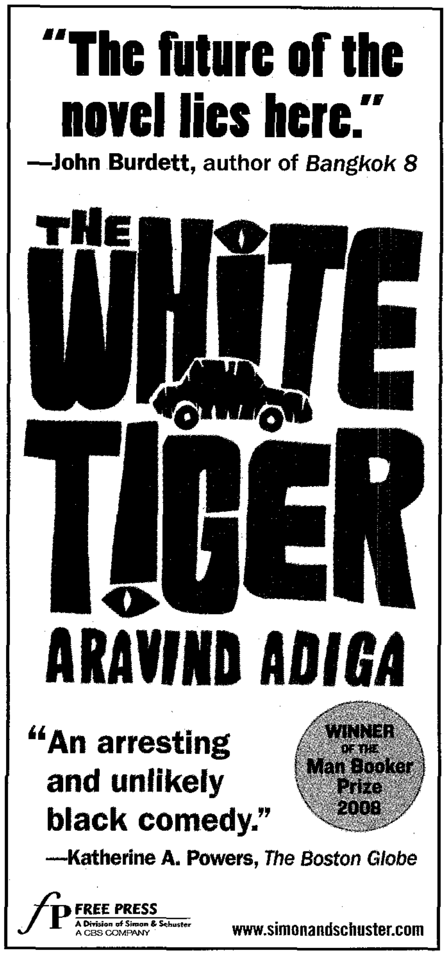
Chairman Mao challenged feudal-era racial stereotypes and applauded the American civil-rights movement as a struggle for liberation. But the change was short-lived; his reformist successors celebrated economic success, not egalitarianism. On Chinese campuses, African exchange students, once treated as comrades in revolution, became symbols of their ailing home countries, and they encountered animosity. Throughout the nineteen-eighties, Chinese and African students clashed on campuses across the country, often triggered by sensitivities over Chinese women dating African men. The tension culminated on Christmas Eve, 1988, at Nanjing's Hehai University, when guards required two black students to register their Chinese dates. It escalated into a riot that left eleven Chinese and two Africans wounded. The next day, Chinese students attacked the Africans' dorm, shouting, "Kill the black devils!" While the Africans fled, thousands of Chinese demonstrated in Nanjing's streets for five nights, chanting racial epithets and demanding retribution. Discrimination was commonplace. When Barry Sautman, a political scientist at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, surveyed Chinese students, intellectuals, and civil servants in 1992, he asked them to rank various foreign groups by intelligence, industriousness, and other virtues. Africans came out at the bottom of the rankings. Foreign reporters at the time quoted African diplomats and businessmen describing daily acts of discrimination.

Today, Chinese campuses aren't marked by racial tension, and in recent surveys Sautman has found substantial declines in incidents of discrimination. Many black expatriates credit the improved atmosphere to an influx of images of diversity. "The N.B.A. has been a de-facto P.R. campaign for black people—especially black Americans—in China," Ron Sims II, a thirty-year-old Web designer who is black and spent two and a half years teaching English in China, told me. "When I tried to explain where I was from in the U.S., no one ever knew Cleveland, but they knew LeBron James."

Still, there isn't much evidence of racial sophistication. In 2006, Sims conducted an informal sidewalk experiment in Fuzhou, a large southern city, in which he asked people to identify photographs of famous black Americans by race. Oprah was identified as Indian; Lena Horne didn't "have the lips of black people"; Beyoncé was white, as was Benjamin Davis, the commander of the Tuskegee Airmen. (The results, called "The Race Game," are on YouTube.) That unfamiliarity exists in China's most cosmopolitan cities, where migrant laborers have come in search of work. John Pollock, a twenty-three-year-old from Atlanta who is studying at Beijing Language and Culture University, said that new arrivals to the city have asked him, "'Do you take showers?' 'Does the color of your skin rub off?' You know, 'Can I touch your hair?'"

As Mass let out at the Stone House Cathedral one Sunday in November, the Nigerians stayed for a while to say a prayer for a countryman, a businessman who had recently collapsed and died. They mounted a collection to fly his body home. The logistics fell to Ojukwu Emma, a man of medium build, with a heavy-lidded calmness to his face, who often wears a dark leather coat that belts in the back. He is married to a Chinese woman, drives a shiny black sedan, and enjoys the kind of settled life that new arrivals envy. He is the president of the Nigerian Community China, an organization based in Guangzhou. His role would be familiar to any immigrant community—the *prominenti* in Little Italy, the *kiu ling* in Chinatown—and he works long hours. One evening, he postponed a scheduled meeting with me until ten o'clock, so that he could escort the Nigerian Ambassador on a visit to their countrymen who were in jail awaiting deportation. He works a short drive from the Canaan market, in a dimly lit office with the Nigerian and Chinese flags standing in the corner, giving the room the air of a makeshift embassy. Once, when I asked him about the businessman whose body he was arranging to fly home, he paused and asked, "Which one?" He was handling six other corpses at the same time.

Emma is a shoe man by training. He first came to do business in China ten years ago, and had achieved modest success by 2004, when he placed a large order—ten shipping containers of shoes—only to discover, upon delivery, that his supplier had used cheap glue. En route from China to Nigeria, the shoes had disintegrated. "I couldn't even salvage one container," he said. He started over, by moving to China full time to oversee every detail of his trades. He was elected to head the Nigerian community, which he esti-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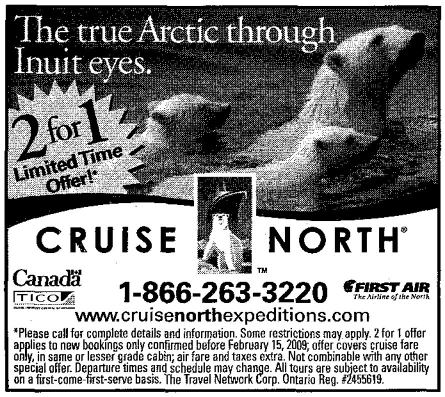
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mates at five thousand to seven thousand people, in Guangzhou. His first task was to defuse China's growing impatience with his people. "Five years ago," he said, "you would come in, drink tea, and then twenty minutes later they put the stamp in your passport."

In the African community, there is a thriving underground market in passports. Traders routinely accuse one another of turning people in to immigration authorities for money or favors. The fear and anonymity are atomizing. "I bought a passport in Malaysia, a look-alike, and I came here with that," a trader with bloodshot eyes who called himself Lucky Okeke told me. "On Thai Air, the flight was so low I thought we would have an accident. I was thinking, Nobody would know what happened to me, because it wasn't even my passport."

As Emma sees it, Guangzhou has become a victim of its own allure. In Lagos and Abuja, local visa agents prey on Nigerians who are desperate to believe in what China might offer them. "The agents, all they want is money. They say, 'You'll get to Guangzhou airport,' and they give you a bus number. And they tell you to go to the Igboezuo"—the Igbo district—"and then a man pays a big amount of money. And then he gets here and he has nothing."

Emma frequently visits hospitals to handle paperwork for Nigerians injured while fleeing immigration police. "We have so many cases of people jumping off the balconies, and they break their legs," he said. Another two hundred Nigerians are in jail awaiting deportation, he says. "They are sending them home every week. Ten or fifteen or twenty." I asked him why he thought his community had ended up in crisis. "Sometimes we look at ourselves and we say, 'The Chinese are racist because we are black.' And sure there are stupid people who might feel that way. But we are also doing things to make it worse," he said.

"GUANGZHOU'S FOREIGNERS' CRIME RATE RISES" was the headline not long ago in the Guangzhou *Daily*, a state-run paper that often chronicles the arrests of Africans on drug-trafficking, fraud, and immigration charges. Emma believes that his people have created their own image problem, and they need to fix it. "That is why we are fighting to unite ourselves and stop breaking the law," he said. "And then maybe it will go back to the old days." One night in September, he got a call telling him that a Nigerian trader had been hospitalized with head injuries after a run-in with Chinese security guards. As the Nigerian press later described it, the trader, Ojide Ekene, had been looking for a place to urinate at the entrance to a subway station when guards struck him with batons and he fell, hitting his head. After thirteen days in the hospital, Ekene died, on October 8th. That day, Nigerians protested outside the subway station and the hospital. News of the death and photographs of the body circulated online, with a bitter string of comments about China's treatment of immigrants. "Nigerian government please do something positive before it becomes uncontrollable," someone wrote, on a message board frequented by Nigerians. Emma urged calm, and, in the end, it held. "I thank God that we could control our people," he told me.

Emma is lobbying the Nigerian government to open a consulate in Guangzhou, to manage relations, and he wants to set up a system requiring Nigerians to have a specific business plan before getting to China. One day, he hopes, they will have African music concerts, a magazine, a Nigerian Day festival. "We want what they have in other countries. They always have a Chinatown," he said. "In Nigeria, they have seven Chinatowns. That is my dream. We want to have that in China."

A couple of hours' drive southeast from Canaan lies the city of Shenzhen. In March, 2004, the Shenzhen *Daily* ran a short feature about a foreigner with an exotic name—Mark Ndesandjo—who had become a frequent volunteer at a local orphanage, teaching music and donating equipment. "The children here don't need food, but there is no art or music to appreciate," he told the paper, which ran a photograph of a tall black man seated at a piano in a crowd of kids. After Barack Obama began his Presidential campaign, Ndesandjo was back in the news. With Obama's face peering out from banners and tank tops in Canaan's shopwindows, and traders wearing Obama lapel pins, reporters discovered that the man at the Shenzhen orphanage was Obama's younger half brother—born in Nairobi to their shared father, Barack Obama, Sr.,

FRENCH HORN

For a few days only,
the plum tree outside the window
shoulders perfection.
No matter the plums will be small,
eaten only by squirrels and jays.
I feast on the one thing, they on another,
the shoaling bees on a third.
What in this unpleated world isn't someone's seduction?
The boy playing his intricate horn in Mahler's Fifth,
in the gaps between playing,
turns it and turns it, dismantles a section,
shakes from it the condensation
of human passage. He is perhaps twenty.
Later he takes his four bows, his face deepening red,
while a girl holds a viola's spruce wood and maple
in one half-opened hand and looks at him hard.
Let others clap.
These two, their ears still ringing, hear nothing.
Not the shouts of *bravo, bravo*,
not the timpanic clamor inside their bodies.
As the plum's blossoms do not hear the bee
nor taste themselves turned into storable honey
by that sumptuous disturbance.

—*Jane Hirshfield*

and his third wife, an American named Ruth Ndesandjo. While Barack was growing up in Hawaii and Indonesia, Mark was growing up in Kenya. When Obama first glimpsed his half brother, during his 1988 visit to Kenya, it was "like looking into a foggy mirror"—"a black man of my height and complexion with a bushy Afro and horn-rimmed glasses," he wrote in "Dreams from My Father." Yet when the two men sat down to flip through a photo album of Ndesandjo's life in Kenya, Obama was unnerved: "They were happy scenes, all of them, and all strangely familiar, as if I were glimpsing some alternative universe that had played itself out behind my back." It was an uneasy meeting; Obama had returned to Africa in search of his roots, but Ndesandjo was uninterested in making his life in what he called "just another poor African country."

When I contacted Ndesandjo in Shenzhen, he was feeling bruised by the press—the *Times* of London had written, "Barack Obama's half-brother has been helping to promote cheap Chinese exports." He suggested that Sui Zhengjun, his friend and business partner, meet me instead. Sui was tall and stylish, with a trace of brawn from the days he spent as a security guard before he went into business. He said that he met Ndesandjo through friends six years ago and was impressed by his interest in the orphanage and his attempts to study Chinese and read the classic "Dream of the Red Chamber." Ndesandjo had come to Shenzhen on an exchange program in 2002, after attending Brown, Stanford, and business school at Emory, and decided to stay, Sui said. The next year, the two friends opened a small consulting company called WorldNEXUS, which helps Chinese companies market to foreign firms. They had invested in a chain of cafés called Cabin Barbecue, he said. Ndesandjo had recently married his longtime Chinese girlfriend, and showed no intention of leaving China.

Before meeting Ndesandjo, Sui had never had a black friend. He said, "I thought they were low-quality people, with little education. You could say my impression was only so-so." He went on, "Most Chinese think of black people this way, because it's a fact. Of course, some black people are well educated. They are talented in sports and music, but, generally, they are not as good in science and culture."

One night after the market closed, Joseph Nwaosu and I went to dinner at one of the small African places tucked among the market buildings. It had Chinese waitresses serving African standbys—jollof rice, fufu, fish stew, okra—and almost every table was taken by African men or mixed couples. Nwaosu was quiet until he brought up an issue that had been on his mind, recently, regarding his future.

"I'm four years out of seminary, and I still dream of being a priest," he said. "The urge to be a priest should have died now," he went on. "Physically I resolved it, but spiritually it's a dilemma."

For months, he had been struggling with whether to try to go back to the seminary. To help make the decision, he was waiting for a sign. He called it "the event." And until it came he was in China, pursuing his other, lesser faith—the market. "My first goal is to make money and wait for the event," he said. "The event will find me. I will not find the event."

After dinner, I dropped him off at his apartment, in a quiet fishing village far from the bustle around Canaan. He lived in a single room the size of his office, lit by a naked fluorescent bulb. The walls were bare, except for a three-inch pink paper palm tree slung from a string around the light switch. A small, squat electric space heater faced out from one corner. His treasured computer, a smudged gray secondhand NEC desktop with a Sony monitor, rested on a narrow table. I sat on his only chair.

The room felt cramped yet empty, and I could not help imagining how silent it would be after I left. But Nwaosu, swaddled in his sweater and parka and sitting on his mattress, seemed resolute. He had mastered the angles. "Sometimes we get cheated, sometimes we cheat others," he said matter-of-factly. Eight months after entering Canaan, he was no longer a rookie. ♦

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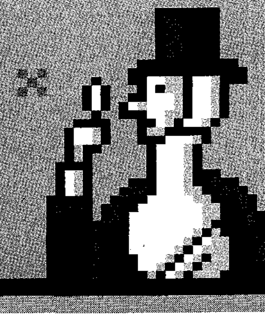


PERSONAL HISTORY

CHECKPOINTS

Fact-checkers do it a tick at a time.

BY JOHN McPHEE

Sara Lippincott, who now lives in Pasadena, having retired as an editor at this magazine in the early nineteen-nineties, worked in *The New Yorker's* fact-checking department from 1966 until 1982. She had a passion for science, and when pieces of writing about science came into the magazine they were generally copied to her desk. In 1973, a long piece of mine called "The Curve of Binding Energy" received her full-time attention for three or four weeks and needed every minute of it. Explaining her work to an audience at a journalism school, Sara once said, "Each word in the piece that has even a shred of fact clinging to it is scrutinized, and, if passed, given the checker's imprimatur, which consists of a tiny pencil tick." From that sixty-thousand-word piece of mine—which was about weapons-grade nuclear material in private industry and what terrorists might or might not do with it—one paragraph in particular stands out in memory for the degree of difficulty it presented to her and the effort she made to keep it or kill it.

It was a story told to me by John A. Wheeler, who, during the Second World War, had been the leading physicist in residence at the Hanford Engineer Works, on the Columbia River in south-central Washington, where he attended the startup and plutonium production of the first large-scale nuclear reactor in the world. In 1939, with the Danish physicist Niels Bohr, Wheeler had identified the atomic nuclei most prone to fission and the consequent release of binding energy. In 1943-44, as the first reactor was being designed for Hanford, Wheeler had insisted on expanding its fundamental cross-section from a circle to a square, so that five hundred extra fuel rods could be inserted, if necessary, into the graphite matrix of the reactor—a colossally expensive alteration made because Wheeler had come to suspect that something like xenon poisoning might affect the reaction. It did, and the increased neutron flux from the additional fuel rods took care of the problem. In Professor Wheeler's office at Princeton University in 1973, I had scribbled notes for about an hour when he said, as a kind of afterthought, that an odd thing happened at Hanford in the winter of 1944-45, or, perhaps, did not happen. He had not observed it himself. He had never seen it mentioned in print. Hanford was a vast, spread-out place in the bunchgrass country, full of rumors, secrecy, and apocryphal stories. If I were to use this story, I would have to authenticate it on my own because he had no idea if it was true. He said he had heard that a Japanese incendiary balloon—one of the weapon balloons that were released in Japan and carried by the jet stream across the Pacific Ocean—had landed on the reactor that was making the plutonium that destroyed Nagasaki, and had shut the reactor down.

The Japanese called the balloons *fusen bakudan*. Thirty-three feet in diameter, they were made of paper and were equipped with incendiary devices or high explosives. In less than a year, nine thousand were launched from a beach on Honshu. They killed six people in Oregon, five of them children, and they started forest fires, and they landed from Alaska to Mexico and as far east as fifteen miles from the center of Detroit. Completing the original manuscript of "The Curve of Binding Energy," which was otherwise not about Hanford, I wrote half a dozen sentences on the balloon that shut down the reactor, and I turned the piece in. If Wheeler's story was true, it would make it into print. If unverifiable, it would be deleted. I hoped it was true. The rest was up to Sara.

Her telephone calls ricocheted all over the United States: from Brookhaven to Bethesda, from La Jolla to

Los Alamos, not to mention Hanford and various targets in the District of Columbia. Interspersed with everything else she had to do in order to arrive—one word at a time—at those countless ticks, she went on making calls about the incendiary balloon for days on end. At last came an apparent breakthrough. Someone told her that he could not authenticate the story, but he knew absolutely who could.

"Oh, yes? Who?"

"John Wheeler."

Every fact-checker dreads "the last-minute heebie-jeebies."

ARNOLD ROTH

I told Sara to abandon the anecdote. The tale was almost surely someone's invention; we should just delete it; she had done enough. She went on making phone calls.

If Sara was looking for information in the dark, the darkness was the long shadow of the wartime secrecy, when forty-five thousand people, from construction workers to theoreticians, lived in Hanford, Pasco, Kennewick, and, especially, Richland, a village of two hundred that the Army bought in 1943 and soon enhanced with more than four thousand houses. The large population notwithstanding, Hanford Engineer Works, of the Manhattan Project, was so secret that the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not know about it. Harry Truman learned of it only after the death of Franklin Roosevelt, in April, 1945. People at Hanford lived among posters that said "Don't Be Caught with Your Mouth Open." They set their urine in bottles on their doorsteps at night so it could be tested for contained plutonium. The people of Richland made babies at a higher rate than any other place in the nation. There was little else to make except plutonium. To put an ear to the ground, so to speak, and listen for spies, a resident F.B.I. agent went to brothels in Pasco and Kennewick, taking with him his beautiful wife. She sat in the car while he did his counter-espionage inside. To profile people who might be easy targets for spies, F.B.I. agents went from house to house trying to learn who the heavier drinkers were and who was climbing into what neighbor's bed. Hanford Engineer Works had its own justices of the peace, its own jail. Taverns were erected for the nighttime bibulation of construction workers, whose tendency to brawl was so intense that Wheeler later recalled "those beer joints with windows close to ground level so that tear gas could be squirted in."

Key personnel were known by false names. Enrico Fermi was Mr. Farmer. Eugene Wigner was Mr. Winger. Arthur Compton was Mr. Comas. People referred to Wheeler as Johnny the Genie. Radiation exposure was called "shine," and the word for radiation itself was "activity." One technician who slipped up and used the "R" word was called to an office and chewed. With extremely few exceptions, the personnel had no idea what they were doing, but they did what they were told. ("We all washed our hands so many times a day I thought I was Lady Macbeth.") The Manhattan Project, at Hanford as elsewhere, required the " 'immediate high amputation' of any human limb with a cut contaminated by plutonium." There could have been a safety billboard: 29 DAYS WITHOUT A HUMERUS LOST. There were black-widow spiders in people's houses. One woman called the government hospital and asked what she should do if a black widow bit her three-year-old daughter. Hospital: "If she goes into convulsions, bring her in. . . ." On and off the site, rumors were ceaseless about Hanford's contribution to the war effort: variously, it was a P.O.W. camp, a processor of solid rocket fuel, a biological kitchen preparing things for germ warfare, a nylon production line (DuPont was the prime industrial contractor). Asked what was really going on, the Army's knowledgeable liaison, Captain Frank Valente, said, "We are dehydrating the Columbia River for shipment overseas."

And now, in late 1973 at *The New Yorker,* the moment was rapidly approaching when "The Curve of Binding Energy" would go to press and alterations would no longer be possible. Once again, I thanked Sara and told her to remove the story of the Japanese balloon. O.K., she said, but maybe if she found a free moment that final afternoon she would make another call or two. Or three. And she did, and she turned up someone in Delaware who told her that he could not authenticate the story, but he knew absolutely who could.

Oh? Who would that be? John Wheeler?

The site manager, B Reactor. He

would surely have known if an incendiary balloon had lit up his building.

Where is he now?

Retired in Florida.

Sara looked up his telephone number. The checking department in those days was equipped floor to ceiling with telephone books. She called. He was not home. He had gone shopping.

Where?

The mall.

Sara called the police. She told them the situation, asked for help, and gave them her telephone number.

Minutes went by but not hours. The piece had not yet gone to press when the site manager called. He was in a telephone booth, the ancestral cell. Sara explained her purpose and read to him a passage that ended as follows:

> The fire balloons were so successful, in fact, that papers were asked not to print news of them, because the United States did not want to encourage the Japanese to release more. The balloon that reached Hanford crossed not only the Pacific but also the Olympic Mountains and the alpine glaciers of the Cascade Range. It now landed on the building containing the reactor that was producing the Nagasaki plutonium, and shut the reactor down.

The manager said to Sara, "How did you know that?"

He went on to say that the balloon had not actually landed on the building but on a high-tension line carrying power to the reactor. There was just enough time to make the fix.

A-Rod makes an occasional error, and so does *The New Yorker*. Rarest of all is a fact that was not erroneous in the original manuscript but became an error in the checking process. When this happens, it can fairly be called an event, like the day the soap sank at Procter & Gamble. This has happened to me only once—and nearly thirty years ago. If blame is to be assigned, heaven forbid, I am not the assignee, and neither is Sara, who checked the piece. Called "Basin and Range," it was the first in a series of long pieces on geology that appeared from time to time across a dozen years. It had extensive introductory passages on themes like plate tectonics and geologic time. In the original manuscript, one paragraph said:

> It is the plates that move. They all move. They move in varying directions and at different speeds. The Adriatic Plate is moving north. The African Plate once came up behind it and drove it into Europe—drove Italy like a nail into Europe—and thus created the Alps.

C Issue, B Issue, A Issue, the schedule drifted, as ever, toward the brink of time, the final and irreversible closing. In one's head as in the surrounding building, things speed up in the ultimate hours and can become, to say the least, frenetic. Joshua Hersh, a modern fact-checker who is characteristically calmer than marble, refers to this zone of time as "the last-minute heebie-jeebies." As "Basin and Range" came within fifteen minutes of closing, so many rocks were flying around in my head that I would have believed Sara if she had told me that limestone is the pit of a fruit. At one minute to zero, she came to tell me that I was wrong about the Adriatic Plate, that it is not moving north but southwest.

Desperately, I said, "Who told you that?"

She said, "Eldridge Moores."

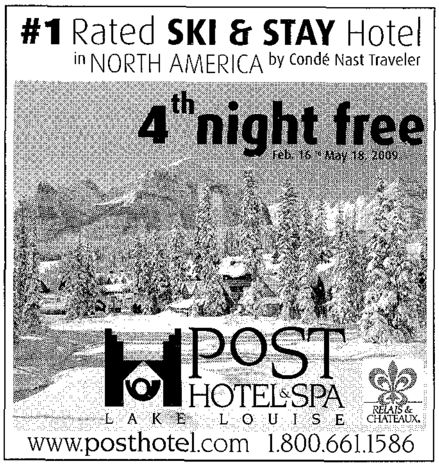
World-class plate theorist, author of innumerable scientific papers on the ophiolitic sequence as the signature of global tectonics, president to be of the Geological Society of America, Eldridge Moores was the generous and quixotic geologist who had undertaken to teach me, on field trip after field trip, the geologic history of, among other places, California, Arizona, Greece, and Cyprus. My head spinning, I said to Sara, "If Eldridge Moores says the Adriatic Plate is moving southwest, it's moving southwest. Please change the sentence."

In the new *New Yorker* on the following Monday, the Adriatic Plate was on its way to Morocco. Leafing through the magazine in an idle moment that week, I called Eldridge and found him in his office at the University of California, Davis. I said, "Eldridge, if the Adriatic Plate is moving southwest, what are the Alps doing there?"

He said, "The Adriatic Plate?"

I said, "The Adriatic Plate."

I believe I actually heard him slap his



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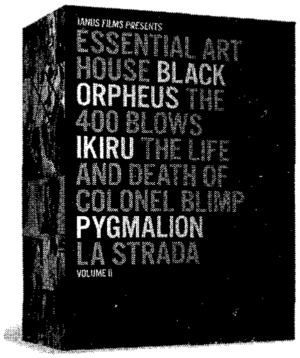

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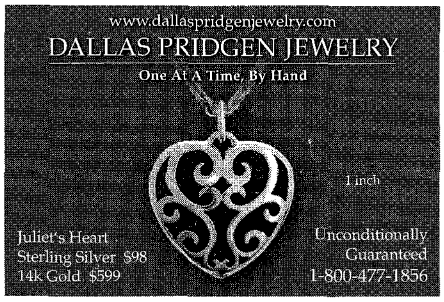

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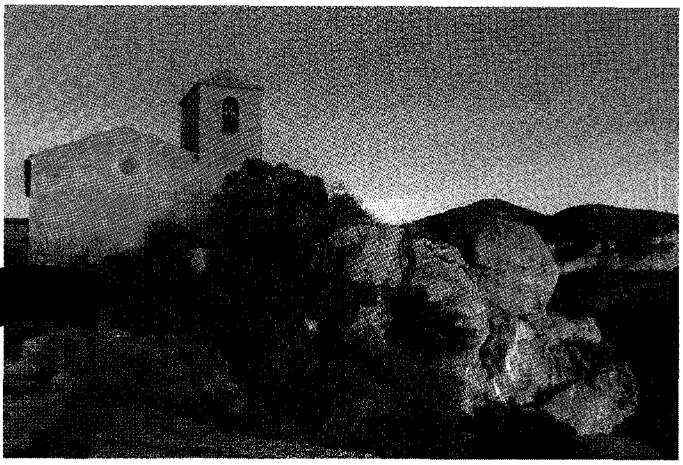
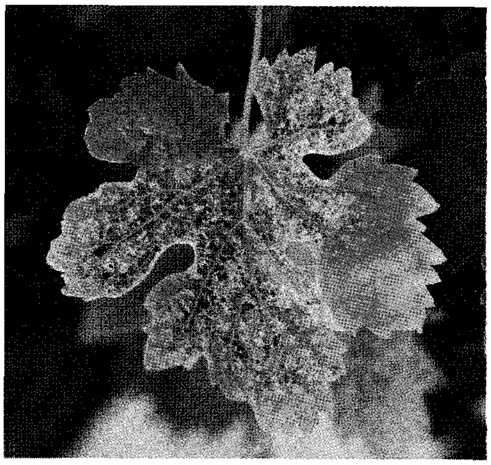
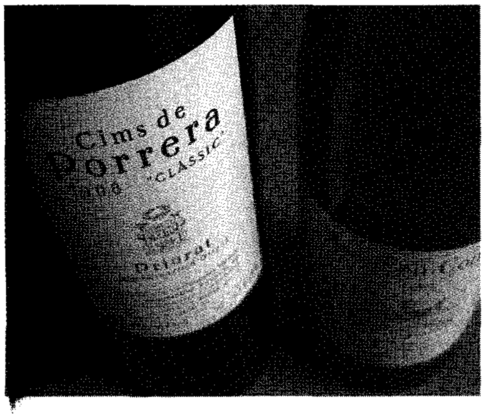




Catalonia's uthern Region

Set among mountainous terrain and captivating medieval towns, the wine district of **Priorat** is known for its rich, intense, world-class bottlings. The output is small for this dry, high-altitude district that defies mechanization. Its dramatic landscape seems to dwarf the prospects of the terraced Garnacha and Cariñena vines, which have to reach deep beneath the slate-rubbled surface to find sustenance.

In the early nineteen-eighties, intrepid wine-makers saw the potential to revive the moribund vineyards that had first been planted around the monasteries built after the Christian conquest of the region in the twelfth century. The wineries are spread among eleven medieval villages about twenty-five miles inland from the coastal city of Tarragona, southwest of Barcelona. Tiny **Gratallops**, perched above the Siurana River, is the crossroads of the new wine trade, with prestigious bodegas (as the wineries are called) and rustic restaurants for sampling vintages with Catalan cuisine. Nearby is Scala Dei (founded in 1163), the Carthusian monastery—or priory, thus "Priorat"—where the vineyards began. Amid its ruins a winery was reborn in the nineteen-seventies and is open for tasting.



Drive east from here to explore the narrow streets of cliffhanging **Siurana**, with its Moorish castle, and medieval-walled **Prades**. Then continue northeast to **Poblet**, where you will face the grandeur of the Cistercian Monastery of Santa María de Poblet. With its resident monks as guides, you can visit the huge wine cellar as well as tombs of the kings of Aragón dating to the twelfth century.

As a home base for this journey **Tarragona** promises both a wide choice of accommodations and an enological preview. An important outpost of the Roman Empire, the city was a center of the wine trade more than two millennia ago, when the Romans planted vineyards here and then shipped the wine back to Rome. Remains of that era include terra-cotta wine amphorae in the Museu Nacional Arqueològic as well as an amphitheatre and circus ruins.

About thirty miles east of Tarragona lies Catalonia's largest wine region, **Penedès**, where most of the country's *cava*, or sparkling wine, is produced. Stop in Vilafranca del Penedès to visit the wine museum, and tour the modernist landmark by Josep Puig i Cadafalch that houses the Codorníu cellars in Sant Sadurní d'Anoia. After this, choose your path: to the east *cava* awaits amid the conviviality of Barcelona, while to the northwest the vines that produce it flourish beneath the solemn and sacred gaze of the Montserrat mountains and their monastery.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: IGLESIA STA MARÍA, SIURANA ©JAVIER ALFARO GUILLEN; CARIÑENA VINE ©JOSE RAMON ISIEGAS GIL; PRIORAT WINES ©RICARDO GINER I SARIOLA

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forehead. "Oh, no!" he said. "Not the Adriatic Plate! The Aegean Plate. The Aegean Plate is moving southwest."

The worst checking error is calling people dead who are not dead. In the words of Josh Hersh, "It really annoys them." Sara remembers a reader in a nursing home who read in *The New Yorker* that he was "the late" reader in the nursing home. He wrote demanding a correction. *The New Yorker*, in its next issue, of course complied, inadvertently doubling the error, because the reader died over the weekend while the magazine was being printed.

Any error is everlasting. As Sara told the journalism students, once an error gets into print it "will live on and on in libraries carefully catalogued, scrupulously indexed . . . silicon-chipped, deceiving researcher after researcher down through the ages, all of whom will make new errors on the strength of the original errors, and so on and on into an exponential explosion of errata." With drawn sword, the fact-checker stands at the near end of this bridge. It is, in part, why the job exists and why, in Sara's words, a publication will believe in "turning a pack of professional skeptics loose on its own galley proofs." Newspapers do not have discrete fact-checking departments, but many magazines do. When I first worked at *Time*—in the year 957, during the reign of Eadwig the All-Fair—*Time's* writers were men, and the researcher/fact-checkers were women. They were expert. When I freelanced a piece to the *Atlantic*, I asked who would do the fact-checking and was told, "That's up to you." The *Atlantic* had a nil budget for fact-checking. A little later, when I sold a piece to *National Geographic* it seemed to have more fact-checkers than there are Indians in the Amazon. *Holiday* and the *Saturday Evening Post* were only a little less assiduous. While *The New Yorker's* fact-checking department had achieved early fame in its field, many other magazines have been just as committed and careful. Twenty-eight years after that first *Atlantic* piece, I sold the *Atlantic* a second one, and this time experienced a checking process equivalent to *The New Yorker's*.

Book publishers prefer to regard fact-checking as the responsibility of authors, which, contractually, comes down to a simple matter of who doesn't pay for what. If material that has appeared in a fact-checked magazine reappears in a book, the author is not the only beneficiary of the checker's work. The book publisher has won a free ticket to factual respectability. Publishers who, for early-marketing purposes, set a text in stone before a magazine's checking department has been through it get what they deserve. An almost foolproof backup screen to the magazine-to-book progression is the magazine's vigilant readership. After an error gets into *The New Yorker*, heat-seeking missiles rise off the earth and home in on the author, the fact-checker, the editor, and even the shade of the founder. As the checking department summarizes it, "No mistakes go unnoticed by readers." In the waning days of 2005, Rebecca Curtis's fine short story "Twenty Grand" appeared in *The New Yorker*. Its characters, in 1979, go into a McDonald's for Chicken McNuggets. McNuggets appeared in *The New Yorker's* Christmas mail. McDonald's had introduced them in 1983.

On the scattered occasions when such a message has come to me, I have written to the reader a note of thanks (unless the letter is somewhere on the continuum between mean-spirited and nasty, which is rarely the case). "You're right!" I say. "And I am very grateful to you, because that mistake will not be present when the piece appears in book form." If, in the reader's letter, there has been just a tonal hint of a smirk, I cannot help adding, "If a lynx-eyed reader like you has gone through those thousands of words and has found only one mistake, I am quite relieved."

In the comfortable knowledge that the fact-checking department is going to follow up behind me, I like to guess at certain names and numbers early on, while I change and re-change and listen to sentences, preferring to hear some ballpark figure or approximate date than the dissonant clink of journalistic terms: WHAT CITY, $000,000, name TK, number TK, Koming. These are forms of promissory note, and a checker is expected to pay it. Koming means what koming sounds like and is sort of kute; TK means "to come." At least for me, they don't serve the sound of a drafted sentence as well as flat-out substitutes, pro-tem inventions. In a freight train a

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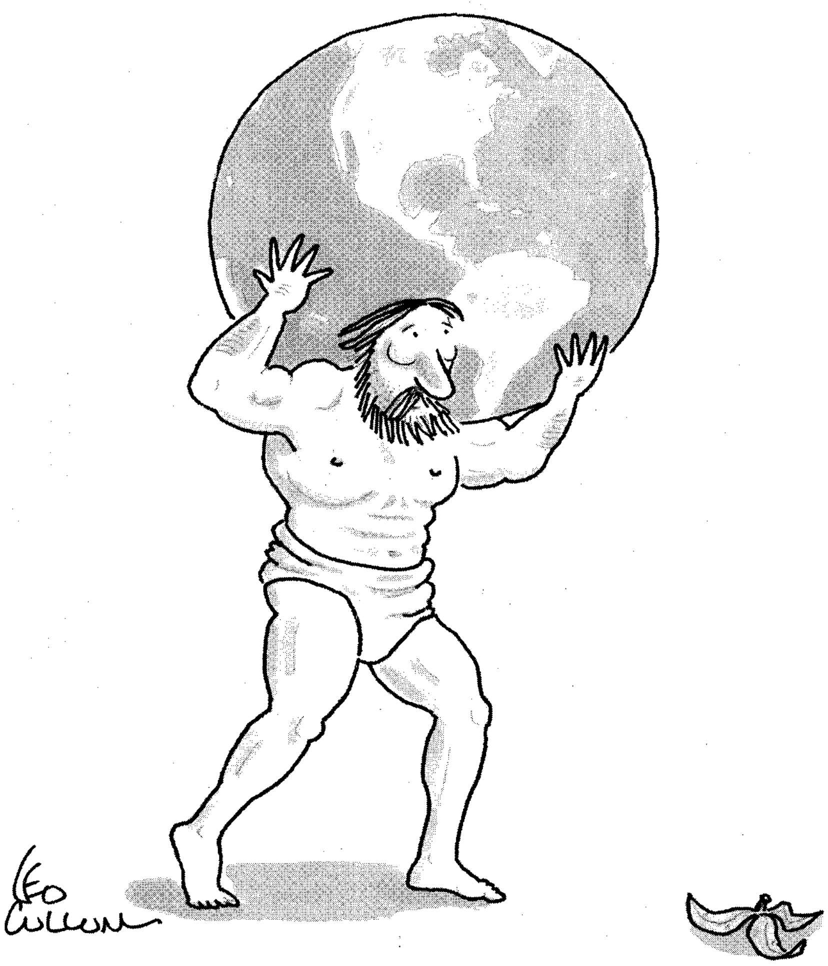

mile and a half long, there is a vital tube of air that runs the full length and controls the brakes. In "Coal Train" (2005), I felt a need for analogy and guessed at one:

> The releasing of the air brakes began at the two ends, and moved toward the middle. The train's very long integral air tube was like the air sac of an American eel.

Before long, the checking department was up to its chin in ichthyologists, and I was informed by Josh Hersh that the air sac of an American eel is proportionally a good deal shorter than the air sac in most ordinary fish.

"Who says so?"

"Willy Bemis."

"Oh."

Willy Bemis is to the anatomy of fishes what Eldridge Moores is to tectonics. Willy was the central figure in a book of mine that had been published three years before, parts of which appeared in *The New Yorker*. He had since left the University of Massachusetts to become director of Shoals Marine Laboratory, the offshore classrooms of Cornell University and the University of New Hampshire. I called him in Ithaca to ask what could be done. Ever accommodating, Willy at first tried to rationalize the eel. Maybe its air sac was up to the job after all. Maybe the analogy would work. I said the eel would never make it through the checking department, or, for that matter, past me. We were close to closing, and right offhand Willy was unable to think of a species with a long enough sac. What to do? What else? He called Harvard. The train's very long integral air tube was like the air sac of a rope fish.

On the Merrimack River in Merrimack, New Hampshire, is a Budweiser brewery that brewed its first Bud in 1970. In 1839, John and Henry Thoreau passed the site in their homemade skiff on the journey that resulted in Henry's first book. A run of white water there had been known as Cromwell's Falls since the seventeenth century, but, Thoreau wrote, "these falls are the Nesenkeag of the Indians," and he went on to say, "Great Nesenkeag Stream comes in on the right just above." New Hampshire has a number of place names that end in the letters "k e a g." The "keag" is pronounced as if the "a" were missing; i.e., "keg." In 2003, my son-in-law Mark Svenvold and I went through Nesenkeag Falls and Namaskeag Falls and Amoskeag Falls, in an Old Town canoe, tracing the Thoreaus' upstream journey, and while dragging the canoe up the rapids I found myself wondering how many kegs that Budweiser plant could produce in a day. Back home and writing, I made up a number out of thin air, and it is what Anne Stringfield, checking the facts, saw on her proof:

> Just above Cromwell's Falls on Route 3, very close to but not visible from the river, is a Budweiser brewery that has a production average of thirteen thousand kegs a day.

Never underestimate Anheuser-Busch. The average production turned out to be eighteen thousand kegs in a day.

Another fluvial piece—"Tight-Assed River"—was checked by Josh Hersh in 2004. He found this on his proof:

> People say, "The Illinois River? What's that? Never heard of it. Where does it go?" Actually, there are two Illinois Rivers in America, each, evidently, as well known as the other.

One is in Illinois, another is in Arkansas and Oklahoma; and those two are all you will find in Merriam-Webster's Geographical Dictionary, which is among the checking department's more revered references. Josh dove into the Web, and came up with a third—an Illinois River in Oregon, which is not well known even in Oregon.

> Actually, there are three Illinois Rivers in America, each, evidently, as well known as the others.

(And now, with this piece, in January of 2009, the fact-checking department has found yet another Illinois River—in Colorado. If I were to republish this bit of fluvial information forty-six more times, evidently we would find an Illinois River in every state in the Union.)

That feat, on Josh's part, was just a stretching exercise before he took on, among other things, a cabin boat that was drifting idly on the eponymous Illinois while a vessel longer than an aircraft carrier bore down upon it sounding five short blasts, the universal

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statement of immediate danger. The vessel, more than eleven hundred feet long and wired rigid, was made up of fifteen barges pushed by a "towboat." I was in the pilothouse scribbling notes.

> At just about the point where the cabin boat would go into our blind spot—the thousand feet of water that we in the pilothouse can't see—people appear on the cabin boat's deck, the boat starts up, and in a manner that seems both haughty and defiant moves slowly and slightly aside. We grind on downriver as the boat moves up to pass us port to port, making its way up the thousand feet of barges to draw even with the pilothouse. Two men and two women are in the cabin boat. The nearest woman—seated left rear in the open part of the cockpit—is wearing a black-and-gold two-piece bathing suit. She has the sort of body you go to see in marble. She has golden hair. Quickly, deftly, she reaches with both hands behind her back and unclasps her top. Setting it on her lap, she swivels ninety degrees to face the towboat square. Shoulders back, cheeks high, she holds her pose without retreat. In her ample presentation there is defiance of gravity. There is no angle of repose. She is a siren, and these are her songs.

So far so checkable. Something like that can be put—in *New Yorker*-speak—"on author." It was my experience, my description, my construction, my erection. No one seemed worried about the color of the bathing suit. I went on, though, to say something close to this:

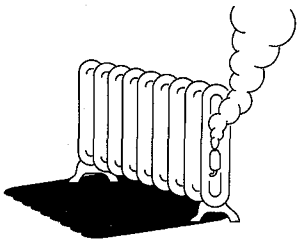
> She is Henry Moore's "Oval with Points." Moore said, "Rounded forms convey an idea of fruitfulness, maturity, probably because the earth, women's breasts, and most fruits are rounded, and these shapes are important because they have this background in our habits of perception. I think the humanist organic element will always be for me of fundamental importance in sculpture."

And now we were into deep checking. In 1975, I had telephoned Lynn Fraker, who was a docent for the art museum at Princeton, where Moore's "Oval with Points" is one of a couple of dozen very large and primarily abstract sculptures that stand outdoors around the campus. I wanted to use them as description exercises in a writing class that I was about to teach for the first time. The Henry Moore, eleven feet tall, is shaped like a doughnut, and from each of its interior sides a conical and breastlike bulge extends toward another conical and breastlike bulge, their business ends nearly touching, as if they were on the ceiling of a chapel. It was my opinion that students should be able to do a better description than that. "Doughnut," for example, was not a word that should be allowed to rise into the company of Henry Moore, and, in every class I have taught since then, I have used the notes from that talk with Lynn Fraker. They include the words of Henry Moore, which she recited from memory. And now in 2004 I had no idea where she read them. She had left Princeton decades before, had remarried, and was unreachable.

The Internet was no help, but Josh, searching through the catalogues of the New York Public Library, learned that collections of Moore's commentaries on sculptural art were in a midtown branch, across Fifth Avenue from the library's main building. After an hour or two there, he found an essay by Moore from a 1937 issue of the BBC's *The Listener*. In the next-to-last paragraph were the words that Lynn Fraker had rattled off to me. They needed very little adjustment to be rendered verbatim, as they are above. After which, we were back to "on author":

> She has not moved—this half-naked Maja outnakeding the whole one. Her nipples are a pair of eyes staring the towboat down. For my part, I want to leap off the tow, swim to her, and ask if there is anything I can do to help.

Perhaps I am giving the fact-checkers too much credit. After all, I do what they do before they do. I don't leave a mountain of work to them, and this is especially true if *The New Yorker* has rejected the piece and I am forging ahead to include it in a book, as happened in 2002, when the magazine turned a cold eye—for some inexplicable reason—on twelve thousand words about the American history of a fish. So I checked the virginal parts of the book myself, risking analogy with the attorney who defends himself and has a fool for a client. The task took me three months—trying to retrace the facts in the manuscript by as many alternate routes as I could think of, as fact-checkers routinely do. There were a couple of passages that slowed things down almost to a halt, when, for one reason or another, it took eons on



the Internet and more time in libraries to determine what to do or not to do.

> Penn's daughter Margaret fished in the Delaware, and wrote home to a brother asking him to "buy for me a four joynted strong fishing Rod and Real with strong good Lines . . ."

The problem was not with the rod or the real but with William Penn's offspring. Should there be commas around Margaret or no commas around Margaret? The presence or absence of commas would, in effect, say whether Penn had one daughter or more than one. The commas—there or missing there—were not just commas; they were facts, neither more nor less factual than the kegs of Bud or the color of Santa's suit. Margaret, one of Penn's several daughters, went into the book without commas. Moving on, I tried to check this one:

> On Wednesday, August 15, 1716, near Cambridge, Massachusetts, Cotton Mather fell out of a canoe while fishing on Spy Pond. After emerging soaked, perplexed, fishless, he said, "My God, help me to understand the meaning of it!" Before long, he was chastising his fellow clerics for wasting God's time in recreational fishing. Not a lot of warmth there. Better to turn to the clergyman Fluviatulis Piscator, known to his family as Joseph Seccombe, who was twenty-one years old when Cotton Mather died. Beside the Merrimack River, in 1739, Piscator delivered a sermon that was later published as "A Discourse utter'd in Part at Ammauskeeg-Falls, in the Fishing-Season." There are nine copies in existence. One was sold at auction in 1986 for fourteen thousand dollars. The one I saw was at the Library Company of Philadelphia. Inserted in it was a book dealer's description that said, "First American book on angling; first American publication on sports of field and stream. Seccombe's defense of fishing is remarkable for coming so early, in a time when fishing for fun needed defending."

There was, in all of that, one part of one sentence that proved, in 2002, exceptionally hard to check. It could easily have been rewritten in a different way, but I stubbornly wished to check it. To wit:

> Joseph Seccombe, who was twenty-one years old when Cotton Mather died.

In order to tick those exact and unmodified words, you would need to know not only the year in which Mather died and the year in which Seccombe was born but also the month and day for each. When Mather died, on February 13, 1728, Seccombe was either twenty-one or twenty-two. Which? The Internet failed me. Libraries failed me. The complete works of Joseph Seccombe and Fluviatulis Piscator failed me. I called Kingston, New Hampshire, where he had served as minister for more than twenty years. The person I reached generously said she would look through town and church records and call me back, which she did, two or three days later. She was sorry. She had looked long and hard, but in Kingston evidently the exact date of Seccombe's birth was nowhere to be found. I was about to give up and insert "in his early twenties" when a crimson light bulb lit up in my head. If Joseph Seccombe was a minister in 1737 (the year he arrived in Kingston), he had been educated somewhere, and in those days in advanced education in the Province of Massachusetts Bay there was one game in town. I called Harvard.

By the main switchboard, I was put through to someone who listened to my question and said right back, within a few seconds, "June 14, 1706." ♦

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The first of John Updike's more than eight hundred contributions to The New Yorker was a comic poem titled "Duet, with Muffled Brake Drums," which appeared in the issue of August 14, 1954. A short story ("Friends from Philadelphia") appeared two months later; his first book review, of an anthology of parodies, was published in 1961. The following are selections—fiction and poetry, unless otherwise noted—from his half century of writing for this magazine.

From "Dentistry and Doubt"

Burton's heart beat like a wasp in a jar as the dentist moved across the room, did unseeable things by the sink, and returned with a full hypodermic. A drop of fluid, by some miracle of adhesion, clung trembling to the needle's tip. Burton opened his mouth while the dentist's back was still turned. When at last the man pivoted, his instrument tilting up, a tension beneath his mustache indicated surprise and perhaps amusement at finding things in such readiness. "Open a little wider, please," he said. "Thank you." The needle moved closer. It was under Burton's nose and out of focus. "Now, this might hurt a little." What a kind thing to say! The sharp prick and the consequent slow, filling ache drove Burton's eyes up, and he saw the tops of the bare willow trees, the frightened white sky, and the black birds. As he watched, one bird joined another on the topmost twig, and then a third joined these two and the twig became radically crescent, and all three birds flapped off to where his eyes could not follow them.

"There," the dentist sighed, in a zephyr of candy and cloves.

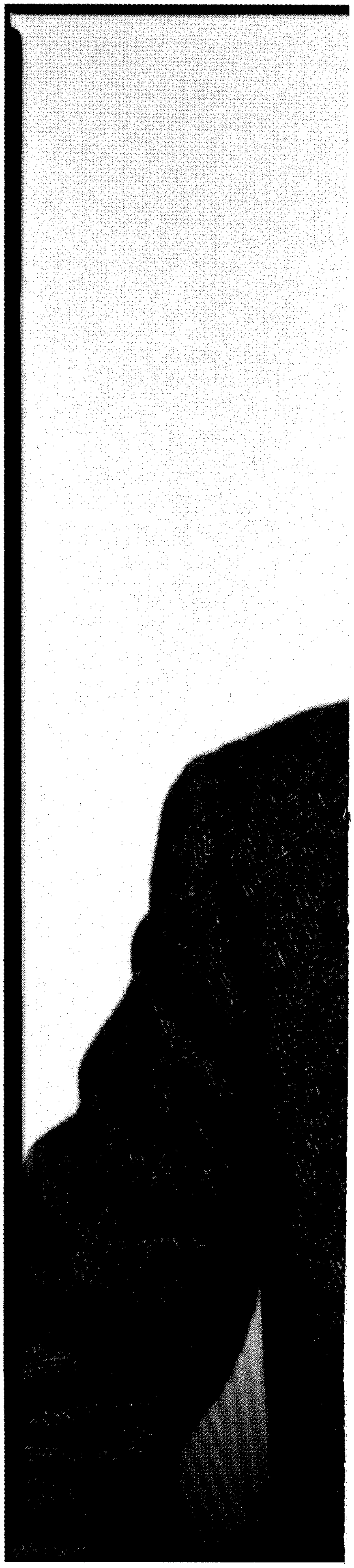
—October 29, 1955

From "The Happiest I've Been"

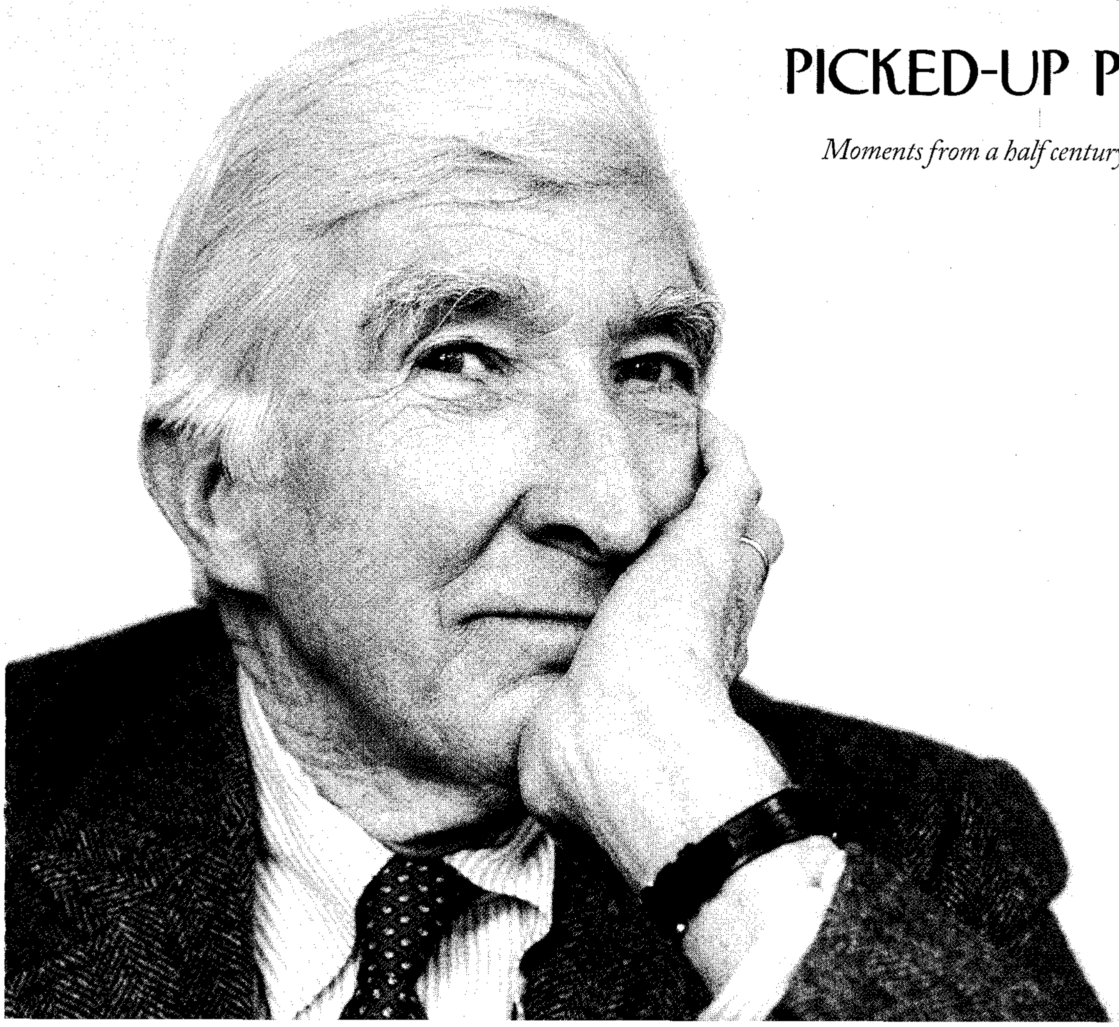
Red dawn light touched the clouds above the black slate roofs as, with a few other cars, we drove through Alton. The moon-sized clock of a beer billboard said ten after six. Olinger was deathly still. The air brightened as we moved along the highway; the glowing wall of my home hung above the woods as we rounded the long curve by the Mennonite dairy. With a .22 I could have had a pane of my parents' bedroom window, and they were dreaming I was in Indiana. My grandfather would be up, stamping around in the kitchen for my grandmother to make him breakfast, or outside walking to see if any ice had formed on the brook. For an instant I genuinely feared he might hail me from the peak of the barn roof. Then trees interceded and we were safe in a landscape where no one cared.

At the entrance to the Turnpike Neil did a strange thing; he stopped the car and had me take the wheel. He had never trusted me to drive his father's car before; he had believed my not knowing where the crankshaft or fuel pump was handicapped my competence to steer. But now he was quite complacent. He hunched under an old mackinaw and leaned his head against the metal of the window frame and soon was asleep. We crossed the Susquehanna on a long smooth bridge below Harrisburg, then began climbing toward the Alleghenies. In the mountains there was snow, a dry dusting like sand that waved back and forth on the road surface. Farther along, there had been a fresh fall that night, about two inches, and the plows had not yet cleared all the lanes. I was passing a Sunoco truck on a high curve when without warning the scraped section gave out and I realized I might skid into the fence, if not over the edge. The radio was singing "Carpets of clover, I'll lay right at your feet," and the speedometer said 81. Nothing happened; the car stayed firm in the snow, and Neil slept through the danger, his face turned skyward and his breath struggling in his nose. It was the first time I heard a contemporary of mine snore.

When we came into tunnel country, the flicker and hollow amplification stirred Neil awake. He sat up, the mackinaw dropping to his lap, and lit a cigarette. A second after the scratch of his match the moment occurred of which each following moment was a slight diminution, as we made the long irregular descent toward Pittsburgh. There were many reasons for my feeling so happy. We were on our way. I had seen a dawn. This far, Neil could appreciate, I had brought us safely. Ahead, a girl waited who, if I asked, would marry me, but first there was a long trip; many hours and towns interceded between me and that encounter. There was



John Updike visiting Harvard University, in 2000. Photograph by Brigitte Lacombe.



FROM OUR PAGES

PICKED-UP PIECES

Moments from a half century of Updike.

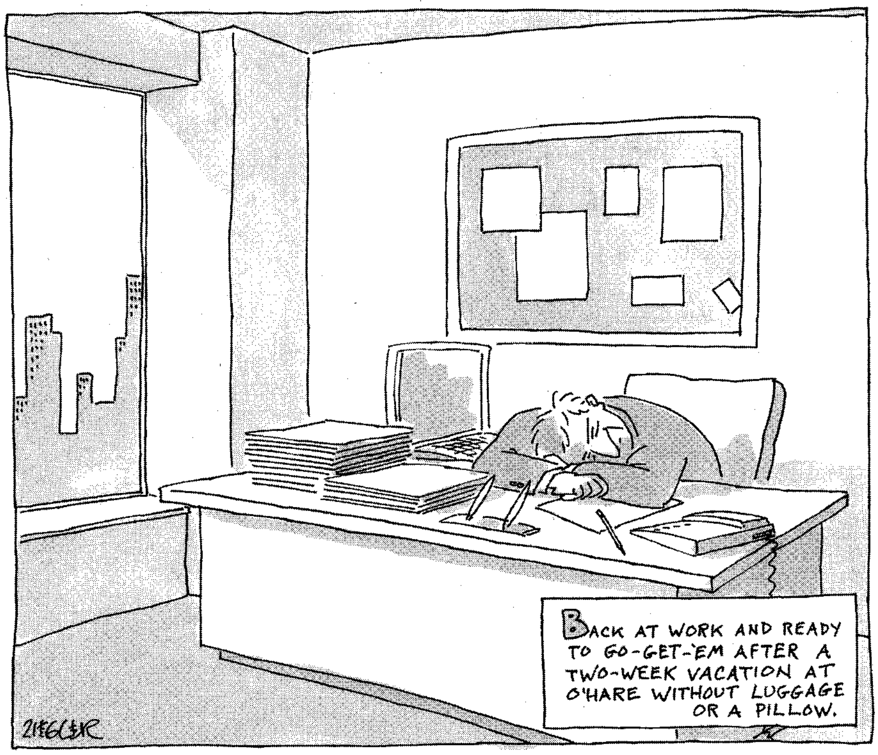
the quality of the 10 A.M. sunlight as it existed in the air ahead of the windshield, filtered by the thin overcast, blessing irresponsibility—you felt you could slice forever through such a cool pure element—and springing, by implying how high these hills had become, a widespreading pride: Pennsylvania, your state—as if you had made your life. And there was knowing that twice since midnight a person had trusted me enough to fall asleep beside me.

—January 3, 1959

From "Flight"

At the age of seventeen I was poorly dressed and funny-looking, and went around thinking about myself in the third person. "Allen Dow strode down the street and home." "Allen Dow smiled a thin sardonic smile." Consciousness of a special destiny made me both arrogant and shy. Years before, when I was eleven or twelve, just on the brink of ceasing to be a little boy, my mother and I, one Sunday afternoon—my father was busy, or asleep—hiked up to the top of Shale Hill, a child's mountain that formed one side of the valley that held our town. There the town lay under us, Olinger, perhaps a thousand homes, the best and biggest of them climbing Shale Hill toward us, and beyond them the blocks of brick houses, one- and two-family, the homes of my friends, sloping down to the pale thread of Buchanan Pike, which strung together the high school, the tennis courts, the movie theatre, the town's few stores and gasoline stations, the elementary school, the Lutheran church. On the other side lay more homes, including our own, a tiny white patch placed just where the land began to rise toward the opposite mountain, Cedar Top. There were rims and rims of hills beyond Cedar Top, and looking south we could see the pike dissolving in other towns and turning out of sight amid the patches of green and brown farmland, and it seemed the entire county was lying exposed under a thin veil of haze. I was old enough to feel embarrassment at standing there alone with my mother, beside a wind-stunted spruce tree, on a long spine of shale. Suddenly she dug her fingers into the hair on my head and announced, "There we all are, and there we'll all be forever." She hesitated before the word "forever," and hesitated again before adding, "Except you, Allen. You're going to fly." A few birds were hung far out over the valley, at the level of our eyes, and in her impulsive way she had just plucked the image from them, but it felt like the clue I had been waiting all my childhood for. My most secret self had been made to respond, and I was intensely embarrassed, and irritably ducked my head out from under her melodramatic hand.

—August 22, 1959


BACK AT WORK AND READY TO GO-GET-'EM AFTER A TWO-WEEK VACATION AT O'HARE WITHOUT LUGGAGE OR A PILLOW.
ZIEGLER

From "Hub Fans Bid Kid Adieu," a sports piece

For me, Williams is the classic ballplayer of the game on a hot August weekday, before a small crowd, when the only thing at stake is the tissue-thin difference between a thing done well and a thing done ill. Baseball is a game of the long season, of relentless and gradual averaging-out. Irrelevance—since the reference point of most individual games is remote and statistical—always threatens its interest, which can be maintained not by the occasional heroics that sportswriters feed upon but by players who always *care;* who care, that is to say, about themselves and their art. Insofar as the clutch hitter is not a sportswriter's myth, he is a vulgarity, like a writer who writes only for money. It may be that, compared to managers' dreams such as Joe DiMaggio and the always helpful Stan Musial, Williams is an icy star. But of all team sports, baseball, with its graceful intermittences of action, its immense and tranquil field sparsely settled with poised men in white, its dispassionate mathematics, seems to me best suited to accommodate, and be ornamented by, a loner. It is an essentially lonely game. No other player visible to my generation has concentrated within himself so much of the sport's poignance, has so assiduously refined his natural skills, has so constantly brought to the plate that intensity of competence that crowds the throat with joy. . . .

The afternoon grew so glowering that in the sixth inning the arc lights were turned on—always a wan sight in the daytime, like the burning headlights of a funeral procession. Aided by the gloom, [Jack] Fisher was slicing through the Sox rookies, and Williams did not come to bat in the seventh. He was second up in the eighth. This was almost certainly his last time to come to the plate in Fenway Park, and instead of merely cheering, as we had at his three previous appearances, we stood, all of us—stood and applauded. Have you ever heard applause in a ballpark? Just applause—no calling, no whistling, just an ocean of handclaps, minute after minute, burst after burst, crowding and running together in continuous succession like the pushes of surf at the edge of the sand. It was a sombre and considered tumult. There was not a boo in it. It seemed to renew itself out of a shifting set of memories as the kid, the Marine, the veteran of feuds and failures and injuries, the friend of children, and the enduring old pro evolved down the bright tunnel of twenty-one summers toward this moment. At last, the umpire signalled for Fisher to pitch; with the other players, he had been frozen in position. Only Williams had moved during the ovation, switching his hat impatiently, ignoring everything except his cherished task. Fisher wound up, and the applause sank into a hush.

Understand that we were a crowd of rational people. We knew that a home run cannot be produced at will; the right pitch must be perfectly met and luck must ride with the ball. Three innings before, we had seen a brave effort fail. The air was soggy; the season was exhausted. Nevertheless, there will always lurk, around a corner in a pocket of our knowledge of the odds, an indefensible hope, and this was one of the times, which you now and then find in sports, when a density of expectation hangs in the air and plucks an event out of the future.

Fisher, after his unsettling wait, was wide with the first pitch. He put the second one over, and Williams swung mightily and missed. The crowd grunted, seeing that classic swing, so long and smooth and quick, exposed, naked in its failure. Fisher threw the third time, Williams swung again, and there it was. The ball climbed on a diagonal line into the vast volume of air over center field. From my angle, behind third base, the ball seemed less an object in flight than the tip of a towering, motionless construct, like the Eiffel Tower or the Tappan Zee Bridge. It was in the books while it was still in the sky. [Jackie] Brandt ran back to the deepest corner of the outfield grass; the ball descended beyond his reach and struck in the crotch where the bullpen met the wall, bounced chunkily, and, as far as I could see, vanished.

Like a feather caught in a vortex, Williams ran around the square of bases at the center of our beseeching screaming. He ran as he always ran out home runs—hurriedly, unsmiling, head down, as if our praise were a storm of rain to get out of. He didn't tip his cap. Though we thumped, wept, and chanted "We want Ted" for minutes after he hid in the dugout, he did not come back. Our noise for some seconds passed beyond excitement into a kind of immense open anguish, a wailing, a cry to be saved. But immortality is nontransferable. The papers said that the other players, and even the umpires on the field, begged him to come out and acknowledge us in some way, but he never had and did not now. Gods do not answer letters.

—October 22, 1960

Cosmic Gall

Every second, hundreds of billions of these neutrinos pass through each square inch of our bodies, coming from above during the day and from below at night, when the sun is shining on the other side of the earth!—*From "An Explanatory Statement on Elementary Particle Physics," by M. A. Ruderman and A. H. Rosenfeld, in American Scientist.*

Neutrinos, they are very small.
They have no charge and have no mass
And do not interact at all.
The earth is just a silly ball
To them, through which they simply pass,
Like dustmaids down a drafty hall
Or photons through a sheet of glass.
They snub the most exquisite gas,
Ignore the most substantial wall,
Cold-shoulder steel and sounding brass,
Insult the stallion in his stall,
And, scorning barriers of class,
Infiltrate you and me! Like tall
And painless guillotines, they fall
Down through our heads into the grass.
At night, they enter at Nepal
And pierce the lover and his lass
From underneath the bed—you call
It wonderful; I call it crass.

—December 17, 1960

Telephone Poles

They have been with us a long time.
They will outlast the elms.
Our eyes, like the eyes of a savage sieving the trees
In his search for game,
Run through them. They blend along small-town streets
Like a race of giants that have faded into mere mythology.
Our eyes, washing clean of belief,
Lift incredulous to their fearsome crowns of bolts, trusses, struts, nuts, insulators, and such
Barnacles as compose
These weathered encrustations of electrical debris—
Each a Gorgon's head, which, seized right,
Could stun us to stone.

Yet they are ours. We made them.
See here, where the cleats of linemen
Have roughened a second bark
Onto the bald trunk. And these spikes
Have been driven sideways at intervals handy for human legs.
The Nature of our construction is in every way
A better fit than the Nature it displaces.
What other tree can you climb where the birds' twitter,
Unscrambled, is English? True, their thin shade is negligible,
But then again there is not that tragic autumnal
Casting-off of leaves to outface annually.
These giants are more constant than evergreens
By being never green.

—January 21, 1961

From "Lifeguard"

On the back rest of my lifeguard's chair is painted a cross—true, a red cross, signifying bandages, splints, spirits of ammonia, and sunburn unguents. Nevertheless, it comforts me. Each morning, mounting into my chair, my athletic and youthfully fuzzy toes expertly gripping the slats that make a ladder, it is as if I am climbing into an immense, rigid, loosely fitting vestment.

Again, in each of my roles I sit attentively perched on the edge of an immensity. That the sea, with its multiform and mysterious hosts, its savage and senseless rages, no longer comfortably serves as a divine metaphor indicates how severely humanism has corrupted the apples of our creed. We seek God now in flowers and good deeds, and the immensities of blue that surround the little scabs of land upon which we draw our lives to their unsatisfactory conclusions are suffused by science with vacuous horror. I myself can hardly bear the thought of stars, or begin to count the mortalities of coral. But from my chair the sea, slightly distended by my higher perspective, seems a misty old gentleman stretched at his ease in an immense armchair which has for arms the arms of this bay and for an antimacassar the freshly laundered sky. Sailboats float on his surface like idle and unrelated but benevolent thoughts. The soughing of the surf is the rhythmic lifting of his ripple-stitched vest as he breathes. Consider. We enter the sea with a shock; our skin and blood shout in protest. But, that instant, that leap, past, what do we find? Ecstasy and buoyance. Swimming offers a parable. We struggle and thrash, and drown; we succumb, even in despair, and float, and are saved.

—June 17, 1961

From "Pigeon Feathers"

He dug the hole, in a spot where there were no strawberry plants, before he studied the pigeons. He had never seen a bird this close before. The feathers were more wonderful than dog's hair; for each filament was shaped within the shape of the feather, and the feathers in turn were trimmed to fit a pattern that flowed without error across the bird's body. He lost himself in the geometrical tides as the feathers now broadened and stiffened to make an edge for flight, now softened and constricted to cup warmth around the mute flesh. And across the surface of the infinitely adjusted yet somehow effortless mechanics of the feathers played idle designs of color, no two alike, designs executed, it seemed, in a controlled rapture, with a joy that hung level in the air above and behind him. Yet these birds bred in the millions and were exterminated as pests. Into the fragrant, open earth he dropped one broadly banded in shades of slate blue, and on top of it another, mottled all over with rhythmic patches of lilac and gray. The next was almost wholly white, yet with a salmon glaze at the throat. As he fitted the last two, still pliant, on the top, and stood up, crusty coverings were lifted from him, and with a feminine, slipping sensation along his nerves that seemed to give the air hands, he was robed in this certainty: that the God who had lavished such craft upon these worthless birds would not destroy His whole Creation by refusing to let David live forever.

—August 19, 1961

From a critical essay on parody

Passionately creative spirits *use* parody, rather roughly; and if the tool snaps in their hands, what of it? The "Aeneid" is a parody of sorts and is most admirable where it is least Homeric, and we may be grateful that the parodic vestiges in "Madame Bovary" (e.g., the descriptions of Emma's girlhood reading) are all but dissolved by Flaubert's sympathetic immersion in his heroine. Some novels might be fairly described as ruined parodies. The little dolls whittled in fun escape the author's derision and take on life. "Joseph Andrews" and "Northanger Abbey" are examples; "Don Quixote" is the towering instance. Cervantes' masterpiece lives not because it succeeds as parody but because it immensely fails.

—September 16, 1961

From a critical essay on Muriel Spark

Detachment is the genius of her fiction. We are lifted above her characters, and though they are reduced in size and cryptically foreshortened, they are all seen at once, and their busy interactions are as plain and pleasing as a solved puzzle. The use by a serious author of fun-house plots, full of trapdoors, abrupt apparitions, and smartly clicking secret panels, may strike American readers as incongruous. We are accustomed to honest autobiographical shapelessness. Ishmael and Huck Finn are alike adrift on vessels whose course they cannot control, through waters whose depths are revealed with a shudder. We remain somewhat aghast at a world that has never been tamed, by either a consecrated social order or an exhaustive natural theology. Our novels tend to be about education rather than products of it; they are soul-searching rather than worldly-wise. English fiction, for all the social and philosophical earthquakes since Chaucer, continues to aspire, with the serenity of a treatise, to a certain dispassionate elevation above the human scene. Hence its greater gaiety and ease of contrivance, its (on the whole) superior finish, and its flattering air of speaking to the reader who, himself presumably educated, may be spared the obvious. But in the last analysis human experience is mired in a solipsism to which America's strenuous confessional exercises are faithful, and authors who rise above the accidents of autobiography are at the mercy of the accidents of knowledgeability.

—September 30, 1961

Earthworm

We pattern our Heaven
on bright butterflies,
but it must be that even
in earth Heaven lies.

The worm we uproot
in turning a spade
returns, careful brute,
to the peace he has made.

God blesses him; he
gives praise with his toil,
lends comfort to me,
and aërates the soil.

—May 12, 1962

From Notes and Comment

These new skyscrapers do not aspire to scrape the sky; at the point of exhaustion, where the old skyscrapers used to taper, gather their dwindling energy, and lunge upward with a heart-stopping spire, these glass boxes suffer the intense architectural embarrassment of having to house the air-conditioning apparatus, and the ascent of windows ends in an awkward piece of slatted veiling. A pity, perhaps, but well suited to an age of anticlimax. Glassy-eyed from contemplation of these buildings made entirely of windows, we walked west feeling oddly empty, as if we had dined on a meal of doughnut holes.

—October 13, 1962

From "In Football Season"

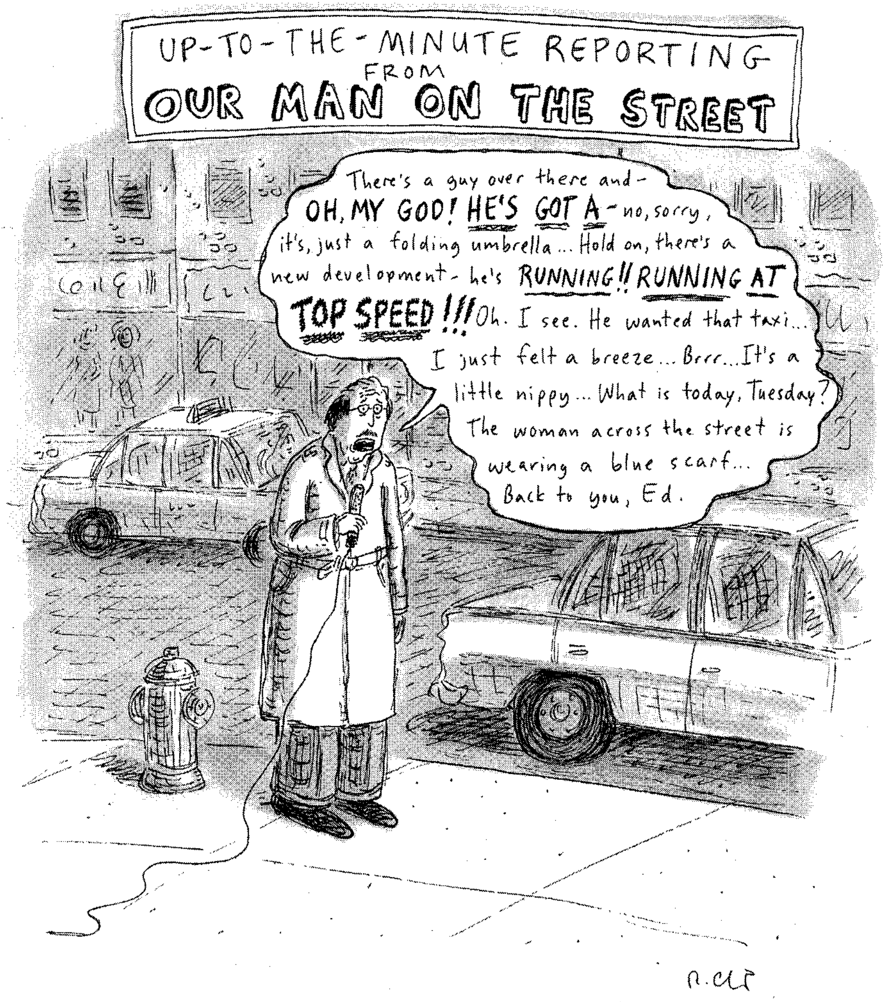
Do you remember a fragrance girls acquire in autumn? As you walk beside them after school, they tighten their arms about their books and bend their heads forward to give a more flattering attention to your words, and in the little intimate area thus formed, carved into the clear air by an implicit crescent, there is a complex fragrance woven of tobacco, powder, lipstick, rinsed hair, and that perhaps imaginary and certainly elusive scent that wool, whether in the lapels of a jacket or the nap of a sweater, seems to yield when the cloudless fall sky like the blue bell of a vacuum lifts toward itself the glad exhalations of all things. This fragrance, so faint and flirtatious on those afternoon walks through the dry leaves, would be banked a thousandfold and lie heavy as the perfume of a flower shop on the dark slope of the stadium when, Friday nights, we played football in the city.

—November 10, 1962

From The Talk of the Town ("Faces")

It occurred to us that there is one feature of the Manhattan landscape that we have never analytically described: the faces. So we went out and examined them. The first thing that struck us was how many, many there are. They occur, with rare exceptions, in a narrow belt of space between four and six feet above the pavement. A few glimmer darklingly from windows at an elevation higher than this, and once in a great while, usually late at night, a face may be seen on the pavement itself, but by and large the faces, with surprising conformity, restrict their ebb and flow, advance and withdrawal, as well as their more intricate cross- and countermovements, to the narrow lateral area described above. Here they hover, like a dense pink cumulus, in a dogged flux as remarkable for its variety as for its nagging persistence.

—November 17, 1962


UP-TO-THE-MINUTE REPORTING FROM OUR MAN ON THE STREET
There's a guy over there and— OH, MY GOD! HE'S GOT A— no, sorry, it's, just a folding umbrella... Hold on, there's a new development— he's RUNNING!! RUNNING AT TOP SPEED!!! Oh. I see. He wanted that taxi... I just felt a breeze... Brrr... It's a little nippy... What is today, Tuesday? The woman across the street is wearing a blue scarf... Back to you, Ed.

From "On the Way to School"

I closed my eyes and relaxed into my warm groove. The blankets my body had heated became soft chains dragging me down; my mouth held a stale ambrosia lulling me to sleep again. The lemon-yellow wallpaper, whose small dark medallions peered out from the pattern with faces like frowning cats, remained printed, negatively in red, on my eyelids. The dream I had been dreaming returned to me. Penny and I had been beside a tree. The top buttons of her blouse were undone, pearl buttons, undone as they had been weeks ago, before Christmas vacation, in the dark Buick in the school parking lot, the heater ticking by our knees. But this was broad day, in a woods of slim trees pierced by light. A blue jay, vivid in every feather, hung in the air motionless, like a hummingbird, but his wings stiffly at his sides, his eye alert like a bead of black glass. When he moved, it was like a stuffed bird being twitched on a string; but he was definitely alive.

"Peter, time to get u-up!"

Her wrist in my lap, I was stroking the inside of her forearm. Stroking and stroking with a patience drawn thinner and thinner. Her silk sleeve was pushed up from the green-veined skin. The rest of the class seemed gathered about us in the woods, watching; though there was no sense of faces. She leaned forward, my Penny, my little dumb, worried Penny. Suddenly, thickly, I loved her. A wonderful honey gathered in my groin. Her flecked green irises were perfect circles with worry; an inner bit of her lower lip, glimmering with moisture, glittered nervously. The pores of her nose showed. She was unnaturally still; something was going wrong.

Sap was flowing from my extremities toward the fork of my body; I seemed delicately distended in the midst of several processes. When from downstairs a loud bumble came crashing, signalling that my father was going to look at the kitchen clock, I wanted to cry, *No, wait*—

"Hey, Cassie, tell the kid it's seven-seventeen. I left a whole mess of papers to correct, I got to be there at eight."

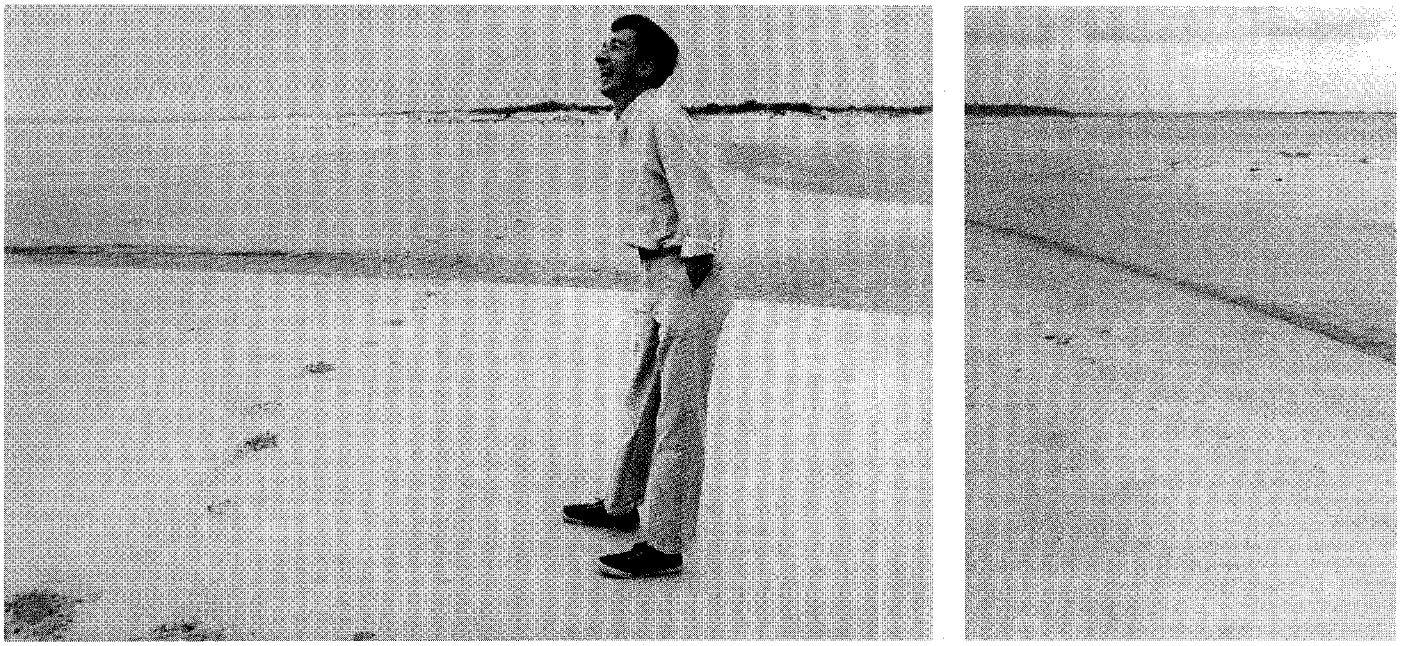
That was it, yes; and in the dream it didn't even seem strange. She became the tree. I was leaning my face against the tree trunk, certain it was her. The last thing I dreamed was the bark of the tree: the crusty ridges and in the black cracks between them tiny green flecks of lichen. Her. My Lord, it was her: help me. Give her back to me.

"*Peter!* Are you trying to torment your father?"

"No! I'm up. For heaven's sake."

"Well then *get* up. *Get* up. I mean it, young man. Now."

I stretched and my body widened into the cool margins of the bed. The sap ebbed. The touching thing was, in the dream, she had known the change was overtaking her; she had felt her fingers turning to leaves, had wanted to tell me (her irises so round) but had not, had protected me, had gone under to wood without a word. And there was that in Penny, which now the dream made vivid to me, what I had hardly felt before, a sheltering



Updike on the beach near his house in Essex, Massachusetts, in the summer of 1962. Photographs by Dennis Stock.

love, young as she was, recent as our touching was, little as I gave her; she would sacrifice for me. And I exulted through my length even as I wondered why. This was a fresh patch of paint in my life.

—January 5, 1963

From Notes and Comment

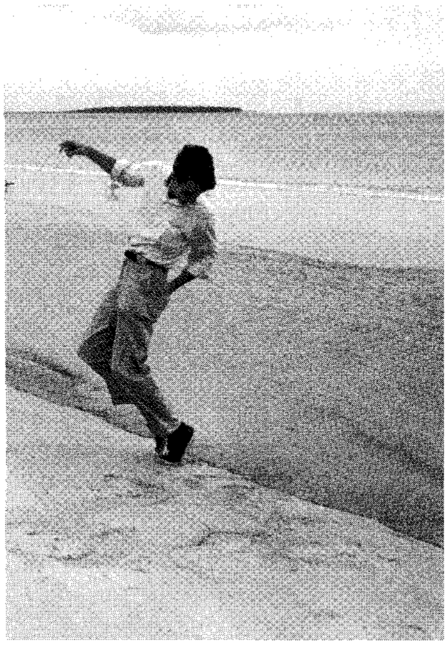
It was as if we slept from Friday to Monday and dreamed an oppressive, unsearchably significant dream, which, we discovered on awaking, millions of others had dreamed also. Furniture, family, the streets, and the sky dissolved; only the dream on television was real. The faces of the world's great mingled with the faces of landladies who had happened to house an unhappy ex-Marine; cathedrals alternated with warehouses, temples of government with suburban garages; anonymous men tugged at a casket in a glaring airport; a murder was committed before our eyes; a Dallas strip-tease artist drawled amiably of her employer's quick temper; the heads of state of the Western world strode down a sunlit street like a grim village rabble; and Jacqueline Kennedy became Persephone, the Queen of Hades and the beautiful bride of grief. All human possibilities, of magnificence and courage, of meanness and confusion, seemed to find an image in this long montage, and a stack of cardboard boxes in Dallas, a tawdry movie house, a tiny rented room where some shaving cream still clung to the underside of a washbasin, a row of parking meters that had witnessed a panicked flight all acquired the opaque and dreadful importance that innocent objects acquire in nightmares.

What did it mean? Can we hope for a meaning? "It's the fashion to hate people in the United States." This quotation might be from one of a hundred admonitory sermons delivered after President Kennedy's death. In actuality, it occurs in an interview granted in 1959 to a United Press reporter, Aline Mosby, by a young American defector then living in Moscow, Lee Harvey Oswald. The presumed assassin did not seem to be a violent man. "He was too quiet, too reserved," his ex-landlord told reporters. "He certainly had the intelligence and he looked like he could be efficient at doing almost anything." In his room, the police found a map on which was marked the precise path that three bullets in fact took. The mind that might have unlocked this puzzle of perfectly aimed, perfectly aimless murder has been itself forever sealed by murder. The second assassination augmented the first, expanded our sense of floating on a dark sea of potential violence. In these cruel events, democracy seemed caricatured; a gun voted, and a drab Dallas neighborhood was hoisted into history.

—December 7, 1963

From "Twin Beds in Rome"

The Maples embarked again upon Rome, and, in this city of steps, of sliding, unfolding perspectives, of many-windowed surfaces of sepia and rose ochre, of buildings so vast one seemed to be outdoors in them, the couple parted. Not physically—they rarely left each other's sight. But they had at last been parted. Both knew it. They became with each other, as in the days of courtship, courteous, gay, and quiet. Their marriage let go like an overgrown vine whose half-hidden stem has been slashed in the dawn by an ancient gardener. They walked arm in arm through seemingly solid blocks of buildings that parted, under examination, into widely separated slices of style and time. At one point she turned to him and said, "Darley, I know what was wrong with us. I'm classic, and you're baroque." They shopped, and saw, and slept, and ate. Sitting across from her in the last of the restaurants that like oases of linen and wine had sustained these level elegiac days, Richard saw that Joan was happy. Her face, released from the terrible tension of hope, had grown smooth; her gestures had taken on the flirting irony of the young; she was almost ecstatically attentive to everything about her; and her voice, as she bent forward to whisper a remark about a woman and a handsome man at another table, was rapid, as if the



very air of her breathing had turned thin and free. She was happy, and, jealous of her happiness, he again grew reluctant to leave her.

—February 8, 1964

From a critical essay on Max Beerbohm

When all the minority reports are in, the trend of our times is overwhelmingly against formal regularity of even the most modest sort; in the "Cantos," Pound has passed beyond free verse into a poetry totally arrhythmic. Our mode is realism, "realistic" is synonymous with "prosaic," and the prose writer's duty is to suppress not only rhyme but any verbal accident that would mar the textural correspondence to the massive, onflowing impersonality that has supplanted the chiming heavens of the saints. In this situation, light verse, an isolated acolyte, tends the thin flame of formal magic and tempers the inhuman darkness of reality with the comedy of human artifice. Light verse precisely lightens; it lessens the gravity of its subject.

—March 7, 1964

From a critical essay on Jorge Luis Borges

What are we to make of him? The economy of his prose, the tact of his imagery, the courage of his thought are there to be admired and emulated. In resounding the note of the marvellous last struck in English by Wells and Chesterton, in permitting infinity to enter and distort his imagination, he has lifted fiction away from the flat earth where most of our novels and short stories still take place. Yet discouragingly large areas of truth seem excluded from his vision. Though the population of the Library somehow replenishes itself, and "fecal necessities" are provided for, neither food nor fornication is mentioned—and in truth they are not generally seen in libraries. I feel in Borges a curious implication: the unrealities of physical science and the senseless repetitions of history have made the world outside the library an uninhabitable vacuum. Literature—that European empire augmented with translations from remote kingdoms—is now the only world capable of housing and sustaining new literature. Is this too curious? Did not Eliot recommend forty years ago, in reviewing "Ulysses," that new novels be retellings of old myths? Is not the greatest of modern novels, "Remembrance of Things Past," about the writing of itself? Have not many books already been written from within Homer and the Bible? Did not Cervantes write from within Ariosto and Shakespeare from within Holinshed? Borges, by predilection and by program, carries these inklings toward a logical extreme: the view of books as, in sum, an alternate creation, vast, accessible, highly colored, rich in arcana, possibly sacred. Just as physical man, in his cities, has manufactured an environment whose scope and challenge and hostility eclipse that of the natural world, so literate man has heaped up a counterfeit universe capable of supporting life. Certainly the traditional novel as a transparent imitation of human circumstance has "a distracted or tired air." Ironic and blasphemous as Borges' hidden message may seem, the texture and method of his creations, though strictly inimitable, answer to a deep need in contemporary literary art—the need to confess the fact of artifice.

—October 30, 1965

From "Museums and Women"

She was the friend of a friend, and she and I, having had lunch with the mutual friend, bade him goodbye and, both being loose in New York for the afternoon, went to a museum together. It was a new one, recently completed after the plan of a recently dead American wizard. It was shaped like a truncated top and its floor was a continuous spiral around an overweening core of empty vertical space. From the leaning, shining walls immense rectangles of torn and spattered canvas projected on thin arms of bent pipe. Menacing magnifications of textural accidents, they needed to be viewed at a distance greater than the architecture afforded. The floor width was limited by a rather slender and low concrete guard wall that more invited than discouraged a plunge into the

MAGNUM

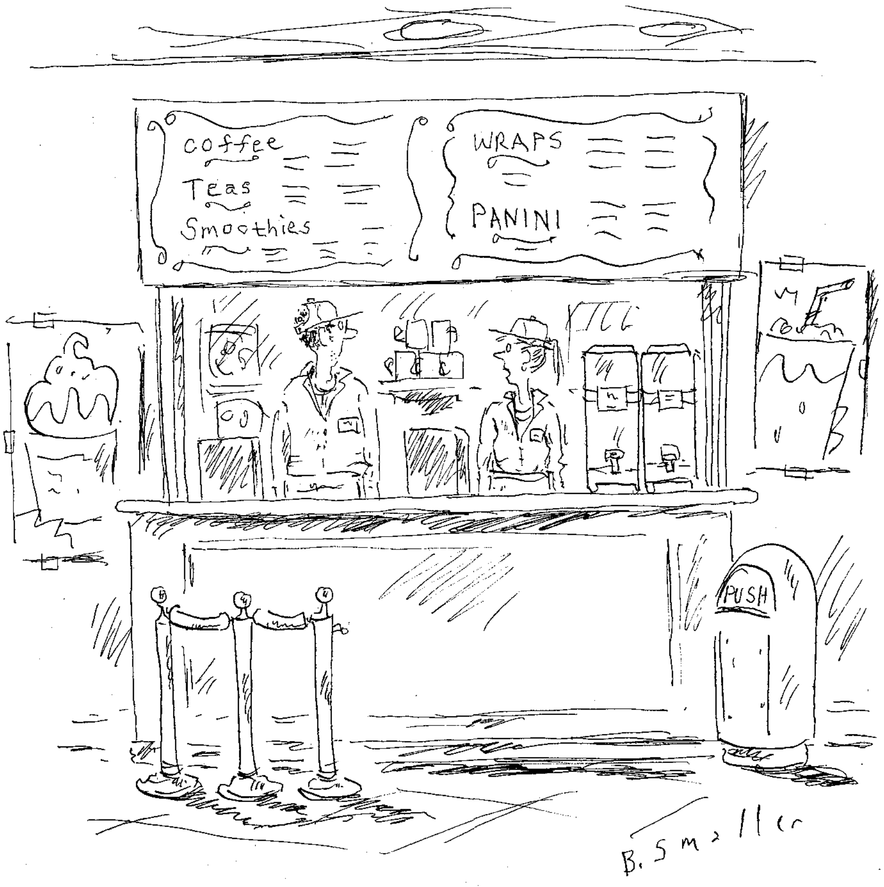
cathedralic depths below. Too reverent to scoff and too dizzy to judge, my unexpected companion and I dutifully unwound our way down the exitless ramp, locked in a wizard's spell. Suddenly, as she lurched backward from one especially explosive painting, her high heels were tricked by the slope, and she fell against me and squeezed my arm. Ferocious gumbos splashed on one side of us; the siren chasm called on the other. She righted herself but did not let go of my arm. Pointing my eyes ahead, inhaling the presence of perfume, feeling like a cliff-climber whose companion has panicked on the sheerest part of the face, I accommodated my arm to her grip and, thus secured, we carefully descended the remainder of the museum. Not until our feet touched the safety of street level were we released. Our bodies separated and did not touch again.

—November 18, 1967

From "Plumbing"

The old house, the house we left, a mile away, seems relieved to be rid of our furniture. The rooms where we lived, where we staged our meals and ceremonies and self-dramatizations and where some of us went from infancy to adolescence, rooms and stairways so imbued with our daily motions that their irregularities were bred into our bones and could be traversed in the dark, do not seem to mourn, as I had thought they would. The house exults in its sudden size, in the reach of its empty corners. Floor boards long muffled by carpets shine as if freshly varnished. Sun pours unobstructed through the curtainless windows. The house is young again. It, too, had a self, a life, which for a time was eclipsed by our lives; now, before its new owners come to burden it, it is free. Now only moonlight makes the floor creak. When, some mornings, I return, to retrieve a few final oddments—andirons, picture frames—the space of the house greets me with virginal impudence. Opening the front door is like opening the door to the cat who comes in with the morning milk, who mews in passing on his way to the beds still warm with our night's sleep, his routine so tenuously attached to ours, by a single mew and a shared roof. Our house forgot us in a day.

—February 20, 1971



"Maybe you're not underemployed—maybe you're just overeducated."

From a review of "Fear of Flying," by Erica Jong

Erica Jong's first novel, "Fear of Flying," feels like a winner. It has class and sass, brightness and bite. Containing all the cracked eggs of the feminist litany, her soufflé rises with a poet's afflatus. She sprinkles on the four-letter words as if women had invented them; her cheerful sexual frankness brings a new flavor to female prose. Mrs. Jong's heroine, Isadora Wing, surveying the "shy, shrinking, schizoid" array of women writers in English, asks, "Where was the female Chaucer?," and the Wife of Bath, were she young and gorgeous, neurotic and Jewish, urban and contemporary, might have written like this. "Fear of Flying" not only stands as a notably luxuriant and glowing bloom in the sometimes thistly garden of "raised" feminine consciousness but belongs to, and hilariously extends, the tradition of "Catcher in the Rye" and "Portnoy's Complaint"—that of the New York voice on the couch, the smart kid's lament.

—December 17, 1973

From "Problems"

1. During the night, *A*, though sleeping with *B*, dreams of *C*. *C* stands at the furthest extremity or (if the image is considered two-dimensionally) the apogee of a curved driveway, perhaps a dream-refraction of the driveway of the house that had once been their shared home. Her figure, though small in the perspective, is vivid, clad in a tomato-red summer dress; her head is thrown back, her hands are on her hips, and her legs have taken a wide, confident stance. She is flaunting herself, perhaps laughing; his impression is of intense female vitality, his emotion is of longing. He awakes troubled. The sleep of *B* beside him is not disturbed; she rests in the certainty that *A* loves her. Indeed, he has left *C* for her, to prove it.

PROBLEM: Which has he more profoundly betrayed, *B* or *C*?

—November 3, 1975

From a critical essay on Louis-Ferdinand Céline

Has any writer ever been as fascinated with noise, with bangs and buzzing and shouts and rattling that fill the world, so that it seems, like the Detroit factory to "Journey"'s hero Bardamu, a "vast frenzy of noise, which filled you within and all around the inside of your skull and lower down rattled your bowels, and climbed to your eyes in infinite, little, quick unending strokes"? Céline's style, with its famous three dots replacing all logical punctuation, became a hammering of "little, quick unending strokes," driven with maniacal monotony toward a single point of deafness, of nothingness, of futility. If cause and effect are discarded, the world has no hinges for disassembly; nothing can be demonstrated save futility. This Céline was inexhaustibly eager to do. His novels, like Beckett's, are testaments of defiance, gratuitous breakings of silence, a numbed survivor's snarled testimony to catastrophes that are scarcely distinguishable. Agglutination and dissolution characterize the Célinean event; where a rationale might be perceived, it is suppressed.

—September 13, 1976

From "Here Come the Maples"

Her hand, in its little cradle of healing apparatus, its warmth unresisting and noncommittal as he held it at her bedside, rested high, nearly at the level of his eyes. On the island, the beds in the log cabin set aside for them were of different heights, and though Joan tried to make them into a double bed, there was a ledge where the mattresses met which either he or she had to cross, amid a discomfort of sheets pulling loose. But the cabin was in the woods and powerful moist scents of pine and fern swept through the screens with the morning chirrup of birds and the evening rustle of animals. There was a rumor there were deer on the island; they crossed the ice in the winter and were trapped when it melted in the spring. Though no one, neither camper nor counsellor, ever saw the deer, the rumor persisted that they were there.

Why then has no one ever seen a quark? Remembering this sentence as he walked along Charles Street toward his apartment, that no one has ever seen a quark, Richard fished in his pockets for the pamphlet on the forces of nature, and came up instead with a new prescription for painkiller, a copy of his marriage license, and the signed affidavit. *Now come . . .* The pamphlet had got folded into it. He couldn't find the sentence, and instead read, *The theory that the strong force becomes stronger as the quarks are pulled apart is somewhat speculative; but its complement, the idea that the force gets weaker as the quarks are pushed closer to each other, is better established.* Yes, he thought, that had happened. In life there are four forces: love, habit, time, and boredom. Love and habit at short range are immensely powerful, but time, lacking a minus charge, accumulates inexorably, and with its brother boredom levels all. He was dying; that made him cruel. His heart flattened in horror at what he had just done. How could he tell Joan what he had done to their marriage license? The very quarks in the telephone circuits would rebel.

In the forest, there had been a green clearing, an eye of grass, a meadow starred with microcosmic white flowers, and here one dusk the deer had come, the female slightly in advance, the male larger and darker, his rump still in shadow as his mate nosed out the day's last sun, the silhouettes of both haloed by the same light that gilded the meadow grass. A fleet of blank-faced motorcyclists roared by, a rummy waved to Richard from a laundromat doorway, a girl in a seductive halter gave him a cold eye, the light changed from red to green, and he could not remember if he needed orange juice or bread, doubly annoyed because he could not remember if they had ever really seen the deer, or if he had imagined the memory, conjured it from the longing that it be so.

—October 11, 1976

From Notes and Comment, on the death of Vladimir Nabokov

What matters now is that the least of his writings offered a bygone sort of delight: a sorcerer's scintillant dignity made of every sentence a potentially magic occasion. He wanted the reader to share his extraordinary intimations; this generosity gave even his scholarly dissertations and diatribes a certain spaciousness, a giddying other dimension. He lived in the world, and more peripatetically and traumatically than many of us, yet in his art declined to submit to the world; rather, he asked that the world submit to the curious, spotty evidence of its own mimetics, its streaks of insane tenderness, its infinitely ingenious interior markings. Few minds so scientific have deigned to serve the gods of fancy; with his passion for precision and for the complex design, he mounted for display the crudest, most futile lurchings of the human heart—lust, terror, nostalgia. The violence and violent comedy of his novels strike us, in the main, as merely descriptive, the way the violences of geology are. He saw from a higher altitude, from the top of the continents he had had to put behind him.

Though some of his asides sounded arrogant, and even peevish, his life in its actions demonstrated immense resilience and a robust optimism. Few men who have lost so much have complained so little. He brought to America the body of a forty-one-year-old man of genius in his native language, but offered no excuse of exhaustion; the same active mind that entertained his insomnia with the invention of chess puzzles now turned to inventing himself anew, as an American writer. That he succeeded, and taught us new ways to use our language and to experience our milieu, is perhaps less remarkable than his willingness to try, when a hundred college Slavic Languages Departments held shelter against the raging of the strange democratic culture whose uncodified quirks swarmed about him.

—July 18, 1977

From "Three Illuminations in the Life of an American Author"

Though Henry Bech, the author, in his middle years had all but ceased to write, his books continued, as if ironically, to live, to cast shuddering shadows toward the center of his life, where that thing called his reputation cowered. To have once imagined and composed fiction, it seemed, laid him under an indelible curse of unreality. The phone rang in the middle of the night and it was a kid on a beer trip wanting to argue about the ambivalent attitude toward Jewishness expressed (his professor felt) in "Brother Pig." "Embrace your ethnicity, man," Bech was advised. He hung up, tried to estimate the hour from the yellowness of the Manhattan night sky, and as the yellow turned to dawn's pearl gray succumbed to the petulant embrace of interrupted sleep. Next morning, he looked to himself, in the bathroom mirror, like one of those chinless misty visitors from "Close Encounters of the Third Kind." His once leonine head, and the frizzing hair expressive of cerebral energy, and the jowls testimonial to companionable bourbon taken in midnight discourse with Philip Rahv were all being whittled by time, its relentless weazening. The phone rang and it was a distant dean, suddenly a buddy, inviting him to become a commencement speaker in Kansas. "Let me be brutally frank," the dean said in his square-shouldered voice. "The seniors' committee voted you in unanimously, once Ken Kesey turned us down. Well, there was one girl who had to be talked around. But it turned out she had never read your stuff, just Kate Millett's condemnation of the rape bits in 'Travel Light.' We gave her an old copy of 'When the Saints,' and now she's your staunchest fan. I don't want to put any unfair pressure on, but you don't want to break that girl's heart. Or do you?"

"I do," Bech solemnly affirmed. But since the dean denied him the passing grade of a laugh, the author had to talk on, digging himself deeper into the bottomless apology his unproductive life had become. He heard himself, unreally, consenting. The date was months away, and nuclear holocaust might intervene.

—August 21, 1978

From a critical essay on Henry Green

His specific sensitivity to life itself, to the local (cosmically speaking) phenomena of living, carried with it an acute awareness of that which is not life, which threatens it. In "Blindness," a rabbit is observed "feeding quietly, trembling at being alive," and John Haye, touching his own scars, finds them "smooth varnished things unlike the clinging life of his skin." The nervous skin of sensation just this side of darkness is where Green's writing lives.

—January 1, 1979

From a critical essay on Herman Melville

At the book's climax, in a very curious phrase, when Moby Dick smashes the ship of his pursuers with "the solid white buttress of his forehead," he is seen "vibrating his predestinating head." Predestinating: the awful absence of God, of the Calvinist God, becomes, in a way, God. Moby Dick represents the utter blank horror of the universe if Godless. Melville has been described as a mystic, but to me he has nothing of mysticism such as might be ascribed to Wordsworth or D. H. Lawrence. Melville is a rational man who wants God to exist. He wants Him to exist for the same reasons we all do: to be our rescuer and appreciator, to act as a confidant in our moments of crisis and to give us reassurance that, over the horizon of our deaths, we will survive.

—May 10, 1982

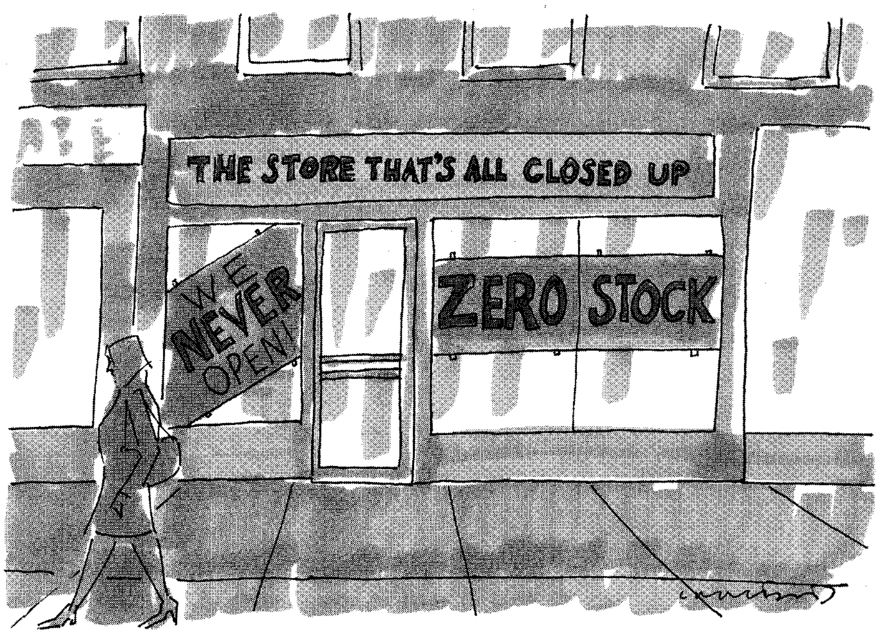
From "A Soft Spring Night in Shillington," a memoir

Two sensations stood out as peculiarly blissful in my childhood, before I discovered (at the same time as leaving Shillington) masturbation. The first has been alluded to: the awareness of things going by, impinging on my consciousness, and then, all beyond my control, sliding away toward their own destination and destiny. The traffic on Philadelphia Avenue was such; the sound of an engine and tires would swell like a gust of wind, the headlight beam would parabolically wheel about the papered walls of my little room, and then the lights and the sound would die, and that dangerous creature of combustion and momentum would be out of my life. To put myself to sleep, I would picture logs floating down a river and then over a waterfall, out of sight. Mailing letters, flushing a toilet, reading the last set of proofs—all have this sweetness of riddance. The second intimation of deep, cosmic joy, also already hinted at, is really a variation of the first: the sensation of shelter, of being out of the rain, but *just* out. I would lean close to the chill windowpane to hear the raindrops ticking on the other side; I would huddle under bushes until the rain penetrated; I loved doorways in a shower. On our side porch, it was my humble job, when it rained, to turn the wicker furniture with its seats to the wall, and in these porous woven caves I would crouch, happy almost to tears, as the rain drummed on the porch rail and rattled the grape leaves of the arbor and touched my wicker shelter with a mist like the vain assault of an atomic army. In both species of delightful experience, the reader may notice, the experiencer is motionless, holding his breath as it were, and the things experienced are morally detached from him: there is nothing he can do, or ought to do, about the flow, the tumult. He is irresponsible, safe, and witnessing: the entire body, for these rapt moments, mimics the position of the essential self in its jungle of physiology, its moldering tangle of inheritance and circumstance. Early in his life, the child I once was sensed the guilt in things, inseparable from the pain, the competition: the sparrow dead on the lawn, the flies swatted on the porch, the impervious leer of the bully on the school playground. The burden of activity, of participation, must clearly be shouldered, and had its pleasures. But they were cruel pleasures. There was nothing cruel about crouching in a shelter and letting phenomena slide by: it was ecstasy. The essential self is innocent, and when it tastes its own innocence knows that it lives forever. If we keep utterly still, we can suffer no wear and tear, and will never die.

—December 24, 1984

From "At War with My Skin," a memoir

Psoriasis keeps you thinking. Strategies of concealment ramify, and self-examination is endless. You are forced to the mirror, again and again; psoriasis compels narcissism, if we suppose a Narcissus who did not like what he saw. In certain lights, your face looks passable; in slightly different lights, not. Shaving mirrors and rearview mirrors in automobiles are merciless, whereas the smoky mirrors in airplane bathrooms are especially flattering and soothing: one's face looks tawny as a movie star's. Flying back from the Caribbean, I used to admire my improved looks; years went by before I noticed that I looked equally good, in the lavatory glow, on the flight down. I cannot pass a reflecting surface on the street without glancing in, in hopes that I have somehow changed. Nature and the self, the great moieties of earthly existence, are each cloven in two by an ambivalent, fascinated attention. One hates one's abnormal, erupting skin but is led into a brooding, solicitous attention toward it. One hates the Nature that has imposed this affliction, but only this same Nature can be appealed to for erasure, for cure. Only Nature can forgive psoriasis; the sufferer in his self-


THE STORE THAT'S ALL CLOSED UP
WE NEVER OPEN!
ZERO STOCK

contempt does not grant to other people this power. Perhaps the unease of my first memory has to do with my mother's presence; I wished to be alone with the air, the sun, the distant noises, the possibility of my hideousness gradually going away.

—September 2, 1985

From a critical essay on evolution

The non-scientist's relation to modern science is basically craven: we look to its discoveries and technology to save us from disease, to give us a faster ride and a softer life, and at the same time we shrink from what it has to tell us of our perilous and insignificant place in the cosmos. Not that threats to our safety and significance were absent from the pre-scientific world, or that arguments against a God-bestowed human grandeur were lacking before Darwin. But our century's revelations of unthinkable largeness and unimaginable smallness, of abysmal stretches of geological time when we were nothing, of supernumerary galaxies and indeterminate subatomic behavior, of a kind of mad mathematical violence at the heart of matter have scorched us deeper than we know. Giacometti's wire-thin, eroded figures body forth the new humanism, and Beckett's minimal monologuists provide its feeble, hopeless voice.

—December 30, 1985

From a critical essay on William Dean Howells

What if you think that the narrative art derives its value and importance—its ethical status—from its imitation of reality, from its truthfulness to our mundane human condition? Then plot is justifiable only to the extent that reality itself can be said to have a plot, a design: plot becomes a philosophical and, indeed, a theological question. For the Greeks, plot traces the vengeance of the gods, often working their will through human passions. For Christians, plot echoes divine Providence and its ultimate justice. In "My Literary Passions" Howells recalled his youthful reading of Dickens:

> While I read him, I was in a world where the right came out best . . . and where merit was crowned with the success which I believe will yet attend it in our daily life . . . In that world of his, in the ideal world, to which the real world must finally conform itself, I dwelt among the shows of things, but under a Providence that governed all things to a good end, and where neither wealth nor birth could avail against virtue or right.

Howells' fiction, however, reveals little instinctive belief that merit will in fact be crowned with success and that the real world must conform itself to the ideal. Raised rather haphazardly as a Swedenborgian, in an Ohio saturated with Protestant piety, he slowly but thoroughly became an agnostic, and, in his middle life, turned to Tolstoy and socialism in lieu of a supernatural faith. Purposefully, then, and not from any mere aesthetic disdain of flashy effectism, his fiction is formless, and was sensed as such by his contemporaries.

—July 13, 1987

Perfection Wasted

And another regrettable thing about death
is the ceasing of your own brand of magic,
which took a whole life to develop and market—
the quips, the witticisms, the slant
adjusted to a few, those loved ones nearest
the lip of the stage, their soft faces blanched
in the footlight glow, their laughter close to tears,
their tears confused with their diamond earrings,
their warm pooled breath in and out with your heartbeat,
their response and your performance twinned.
The jokes over the phone. The memories packed
in the rapid-access file. The whole act.
Who will do it again? That's it: no one;
imitators and descendants aren't the same.

—May 7, 1990

From "A Sandstone Farmhouse"

Working his way, after her death, through all the accumulated souvenirs of her life, Joey was fascinated by the college yearbooks that preserved her girlish image above a line or two of verse:

> She's blest with temper, whose unclouded ray
> Can make tomorrow cheerful as today.

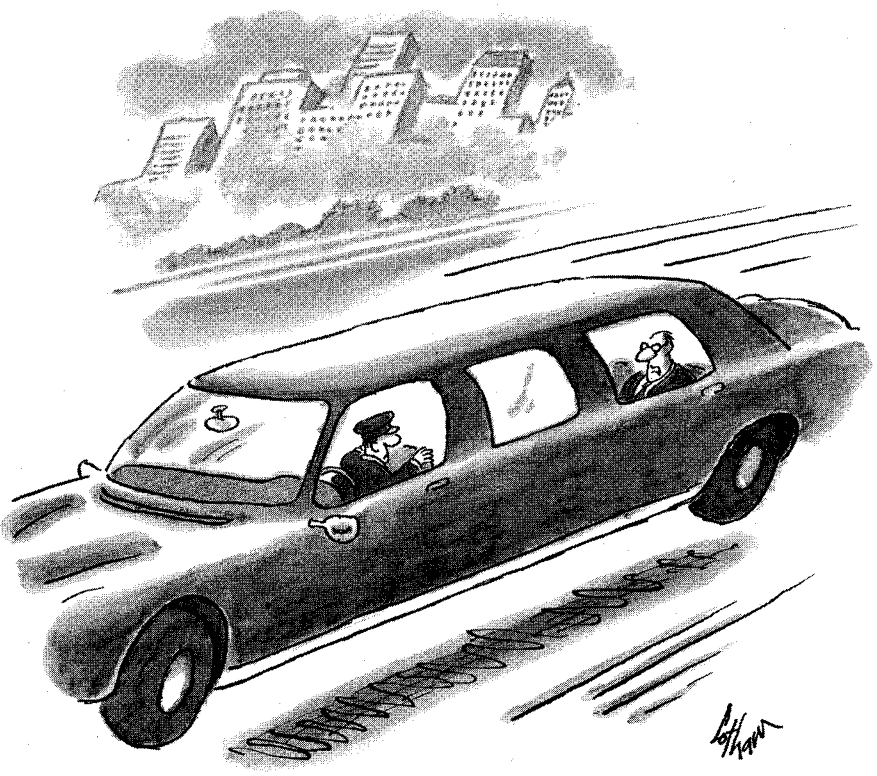
Group photographs showed his mother as part of the hockey team, the hiking club. With a magnifying glass he studied her unsmiling, competitive face, with her hair in two balls at her ears and a headband over her bangs. Her face seemed slightly larger than the other girls', a childlike oval broadest at the brow, its defenses relatively unevolved. As he sat there beside the cherry casket crying, his former wives and adult children stealing nervous peeks at him, the young woman ran for the trolley car, her breath catching, her panting mixed with a sighing laughter at herself, and the image was as potent, as fertile, as a classic advertisement, which endlessly taps something deep and needy within us. The image of her running down the street, away from him, trailed like a comet's tail the maternal enactments of those misty years when he was a child—crayoning with him on the living-room floor, sewing him Halloween costumes in the shape of Disney creatures, having him lift what she called the "skirts" of the bushes in the lawn while she pushed the old reel mower under them—but from her point of view; he seemed to feel from within his mother's head the situation, herself and this small son, this defenseless gurgling hatched creature, and the tentative motions of her mind and instincts as she, as new to mothering as he was to being a child, explored the terrain between them.

—June 11, 1990

From "Farrell's Caddie"

Farrell, prim and reserved by nature, had relatively little to offer of his caddie. He worried about the man's incessant smoking, and whether at the end of a round he tipped him too much less than what a Japanese golfer would have given. As the week went by, their relationship had become more intuitive. "A 6-iron?" Farrell would now say, and without a word would be handed the club. Once, he had dared decline an offered 6, asked for the 5, and sailed his unusually well-struck shot into the sedge beyond the green. On the greens, where he at first had been bothered by the caddie's explicit directives, so that he forgot to stroke the ball firmly, he had come to depend upon Sandy's advice, and would expertly tilt his ear close to the caddie's mouth and try to envision the curve of the ball into the center of the hole from "an inch an' a fingernail tae th' laift." Farrell began to sink putts. He began to get pars, as the whitecaps flashed on one side of the links and on the other the wine-red electric commuter trains swiftly glided up to Glasgow and back. This was happiness, on this wasteland between the tracks and the beach, and freedom, of a wild and windy sort. On the morning of his last day, having sliced his first drive into the edge of the rough, between a thistle and what appeared to be a child's weathered tombstone, Farrell bent his ear close to the caddie's mouth for advice, and heard, "Ye'd be better leavin' 'er."

"Beg pardon?" Farrell said, as he had all week, when the glottal, hiccupping accent had become opaque. Today the acoustics were especially bad; a near-gale off the sea was making his rain pants rattle like machine guns, and deformed his eyeballs with air pressure as he tried to squint down. When he could stop seeing double, his lie looked fair—semi-embedded.



"There's no need to look at me when I'm talking to you."

"Yer missus," Sandy clarified, passing over the 8-iron. "Ere it's tae late, mon. She was never yer type. Tae proper."

"Shouldn't this be a wedge?" Farrell asked uncertainly.

"Nay, it's sittin' up guid enough," the caddie said, pressing his foot into the heather behind the ball, so it rose up like ooze out of mud. "Ye kin reach with th' 8," he said. "Go fer yer par. Yer fauts er a' in yer mind; ye tend t' play defensive."

—February 25, 1991

From "Falling Asleep Up North"

Falling asleep has never struck me as a very natural thing to do. There is a surreal trickiness to traversing that in-between area, when the grip of consciousness is slipping but has not quite let go and curious mutated thoughts pass as normal cogitation unless snapped into clear light by a creaking door, or one's bed partner shifting position on the remarkably noisy sheets. The little fumbling larvae of nonsense that precede dreams' uninhibited butterflies are disastrously exposed to a light they cannot survive, and one must begin again, relaxing the mind into unravelling. Consciousness of the process balks it; the brain, watching itself, will not close its thousand eyes. The brain, circling in the cell of wakefulness, panics at the poverty of its domain—these worn-out obsessions, these threadbare word games, these pointless grievances, these picayune plans for tomorrow which yet loom, hours from execution, as unbearably momentous. Life itself, that agitation of electrified molecules, becomes a captivity, a hellish endless churning, in which one is as alone as Satan, twisting and turning and boring a conical hole in the darkness, while on every side the wide world gently, blessedly snores.

—May 6, 1991

Briefly Noted, "U and I: A True Story," by Nicholson Baker

Mr. Baker extends the delightful mini-realism of his two short novels "The Mezzanine" and "Room Temperature" into this book-length essay, a close and self-pitiless examination of his relationship with a mental figment derived from a fractional perusal and a few personal glimpses of the author John Updike. The younger writer looks to “Updike” less to learn how to write than to learn how to be a writer; he focusses therefore on the behavioral aspects of his topic’s œuvre—dedications, prize-acceptance speeches, prefaces to special editions of his novels, even the phrases on copyright pages. Before composing this peculiar *hommage*, Mr. Baker resolved not to consult the works of its titular co-hero, and his memory, bracketed addenda reveal, usually tricked him. He marvels, for instance, at Updike’s creative use of the word “pool” to signify the head of a dandelion, when the word really employed was the unremarkable “poll,” as in “poll tax” and “to pollard.” Mr. Baker’s own vocabulary glitters on the verge of fireworks: he can be “as *tarabiscoté* as George Saintsbury or Henry James” while he goes about “impanating”—placing in bread—“doings in linear sentences.” His scrupulous wrestle with the impalpable can be quite comic, but his basic point is serious: out of the books of others we sift a book of our own, wherein we read the lessons we need to hear.

—May 13, 1991

From “Playing with Dynamite”

He often felt now, going through the motions of living—shaving, dressing, responding to questions, measuring up to small emergencies—that he was enacting a part in a play at the end of its run, while mentally rehearsing his lines in the next play to be put on. It was repertory theatre, evidently. When he remembered how death had once loomed at him, so vivid and large that it had a distinct smell, like the scent of chalk up close to the schoolroom blackboard, he marvelled, rather patronizingly. When had he ceased to fear death—or, so to say, to grasp it? The moment was as clear in his mind as a black-and-white striped gate at a border crossing: the moment when he first slept with Lorna Kramer.

How inky-black her eyes seemed, amid the snowy whiteness of the sheets! There was snow outside, too, hushing the world in sunstruck brilliance. Meltwater tapped in the aluminum gutters. There had been a feeling of coolness, of freshly laundered sheets, of contacts never before achieved, by fingertips icy with nervousness. He had peeled off her black lace bra—her back arched up from the mattress to give him access to the catches—almost reluctantly, knowing there would be a white flash that would obliterate everything that had existed of his life before. She had smiled encouragingly, timorously. They were in it together. Her teeth were, after all, less than perfect, with protuberant canines that made the bicuspids next to them seem shadowy. Her pupils were contracted to the size of pencil leads by the relentless light; he had never seen anything so clearly as he saw her now, the fine mechanism of her, the specialized flesh of her lips, the trip wires of her hair; he got out of the bed to lower the shade, the sight of her was such a blinding assault.

A dull reddish bird, a female cardinal, was hopping about on the delicately tracked-up snow beneath the bird feeder a story below, pecking at scattered seed. A whole blameless town of roofs and smoking chimneys and snow-drenched trees stretched beyond, under an overturned bowl of blue light that made Fanshawe’s vision wince. He drew the curtain on it and in merciful twilight returned to where Lorna lay still as a stick. He heard his blood striding in his skull, he felt so full of life. Sex or death, you pick your poison. That had been forever ago. She was still younger and spryer than he, but all things were relative. He did not envy those forever-ago people, for whom the world had such a weight of consequence. Like the Titans, they seemed beautiful but sad in their brief heyday, transition figures between chaos and an airier pantheon.

—October 5, 1992

From “Lost Art,” a memoir

At a certain votive stage, I cut out favorite strips and made little long cardboard books of them, held together with those nail-like brass fasteners whose flat stem splits open, it always occurred to me, like a loose-jointed dancer’s legs. In my passionate doting I cut cartoons out of magazines and pasted them in large scrapbooks, agonizing over which to choose when two were back to back—my first brush with editorial judgment. And of course I copied, copied onto paper and onto slick white cardboard, trying to master each quirk of these miniature universes. Li’l Abner’s hair was always seen with the parting toward the viewer, and Mickey Mouse’s circular ears were never seen on edge, and Downwind, in Zack Mosley’s “Smilin’ Jack,” was always shown with face averted, and Smokey Stover, in Bill Holman’s “Krazy Kat”-ish slapstick, kept saying “Foo” apropos of nothing and drove vehicles that were endlessly shedding their nuts and bolts. God—the heat, the quest, the bliss of it—was in the details. The way the letters of POW! or SHAZAM! overlapped, the qualities of the clouds that indicated explosions or thoughts, the whirling Saturns and stars that accompanied a blow to the head, the variations played upon the talk balloon, that two-dimensional irruption into the panel’s three-dimensional space, invisible to its inhabitants and yet critical to their intercourse—all this had to be studied, imitated, absorbed. The studying occurred mostly on the floor, my head lifted up on my elbows but not very high. When I drew, too, my nose had to be close to the paper, though I was not generally nearsighted. But the *entering in* required close examination, as though I were physically worming my way into those panels, those lines fat and slender, those energetic zigzags, those shading dots I learned to call Benday.

—December 15, 1997

From “Christmas Cards,” a memoir

Some elemental, mournful triangle seems sketched: my grandparents, those distant, grave, friendly adjuncts, are absent from the room as I remember it. My parents are above me, the presents shorn of wrapping are around me, the three-rail Lionel tracks are by my knees, the tree with its resiny scent presses close. I have no memory of what I did receive that Christmas—the wooden skis, perhaps, with leather-strap bindings that never held, or a shiny children’s classic that would stay unread. I feel, for a moment, the triangle flip: through the little velvety box of cards I see my parents in their poverty, their useless gentility, their unspoken plight of homelessness, their clinging to each other through such tokens, and through me. I become in my memory their parent, looking down and precociously grieving for them.

—December 22 & 29, 1997

From "How Was It, Really?"

Increasingly, Ed Franklin had trouble remembering how it had actually been in the broad middle stretch of his life when he was living with his first wife and helping her, however distractedly, raise their children. His second marriage, which had once seemed so shiny and amazing and new, now was as old as his first had been—twenty-two years, exactly—when he had, one ghastly weekend, left it. His second wife, Vanessa, and he lived in a house much too big for them yet so full of souvenirs and fragile inherited treasures that they could not imagine living elsewhere. In their present circle of friends, the main gossip was of health and death, whereas once the telephone wires had buzzed with word of affairs and divorces. His present wife would set down the telephone to announce that Herbie Edgerton's cancer had come back and appeared to be into his lymph nodes and bones now; thirty years ago, his first wife, Alissa, would hang up and ask him if they were free for drinks and take-out pizza at the Bradleys' this Saturday. Yes, she would go on, it was such short notice that it would have been rude from anybody but the Bradleys. They were socially voracious, now that psychotherapy had helped them to see that they couldn't stand each other. Everybody's mental and marital health, Ed remembered, was frail, so frail that women, meeting, would follow their "How are you?" with "No, how are you really?"

—May 17, 1999

From "Elsie by Starlight"

From somewhere not too distant there was a hoot, an owl or possibly a signal from a murderous, demented gang that lived here in caves and came out at night. *Suppose the car doesn't start?* he thought again. It often didn't, in rainstorms, or on cold mornings, his father frantic, flooding the engine in his panic, so the wearying starter turned it over, uncatching, *cooga cooga*. "Did you hear something?" he asked Elsie.

She had left her loafers on the gritty floor of the car and had risen up, bare now even to her feet, to kneel on the seat beside him, stroking his face as he tongued her breasts; even in his state of growing terror he marvelled, holding her tight, at the *give* of a girl's waist, at the semi-liquid space below the ribs and then, behind, the downy hard plate at the base of the spine and the glassy globes of her buttocks, smooth into the cleavage, all of it unified like the silvery body of a fish, all so simple and true, the simple truth of her, alive in his arms. He heard the distant hoot again. Something rustled near the car tires. She felt his mouth losing interest in her nipple, and began to listen with him. Behind the skin between her breasts, her heart was beating. "I don't think so," Elsie answered, her voice losing its movie-screen largeness and becoming small, with a childish quaver.

For reassurance she added, "He says nobody ever comes here except in hunting season." But she, too, must have seen the cans and wrappers in the headlights, evidence of others. *He:* her father, the owner, all around them, hating Owen, what he was doing to his daughter, striving in every twig and trunk to eject the two of them. They listened and heard a noise so faint it could have just been saliva rattling in their held breath. Owen's hands began to move again, gathering her tender taut nakedness closer to him, his fingertips finding a touch of fuzz in the cleavage behind. He wondered how to get his head down to kiss that soft shadow he had glimpsed; it seemed shyer, gauzier than what he had seen in dirty photographs and drawings, the few he *had* seen. His prick was aching behind his fly, and her hand dropped and, the first time ever, began fumbling at his belt buckle to release it, its imperious pressure, its closeted sour smell.

But he had spooked her, he had spooked them both, and the desire that dominated him, bare-chested though he was, was the desire to escape, to see if the car could start and he could back it up that narrow road without hitting a tree or a deep hole. Her father's land, and her nakedness in it like a shout: Owen was vulnerable, criminal even—trespassing, and she a minor. He must restore her intact to society. The rustling near the tires became a sudden thrashing, a distinct lunge of the unknown.

"Elsie," he whispered.

"What?" Perhaps expecting some avowal, some earthy plea.

"Let's get out of here."

She hesitated. He heard her heart beat, her breath whistle. "It's up to you," she decided in the mannerly voice that she had used with his mother. Then, catching his mood, she whispered, "Yes, let's."

—July 5, 2004

From "My Father's Tears"

Even my stay-at-home mother, no traveller but a reader, had a connection to the station: it was the only place in the city where you could buy *The American Mercury* and *The Atlantic Monthly*. Like the stately Carnegie library two blocks down Franklin Street, it was a place you felt safe inside. It had been built for eternity, when the railroads looked to be with us forever—a four-square granite temple with marble floors, a high ceiling whose gilded coffers glinted through a coating of coal smoke, and tall-backed waiting benches as grave as church pews. The radiators clanked and the walls murmured as if giving back some of the human noise they absorbed, day and night. The newsstand and coffee shop were usually busy, and the waiting room was always warm, as my father and I had discovered on more than one winter night. We had been commuters to the same high school, he as a teacher and I as a student, in secondhand cars that on more than one occasion failed to start, or got stuck in a snowstorm. We would make our way to the station, one place sure to be open.

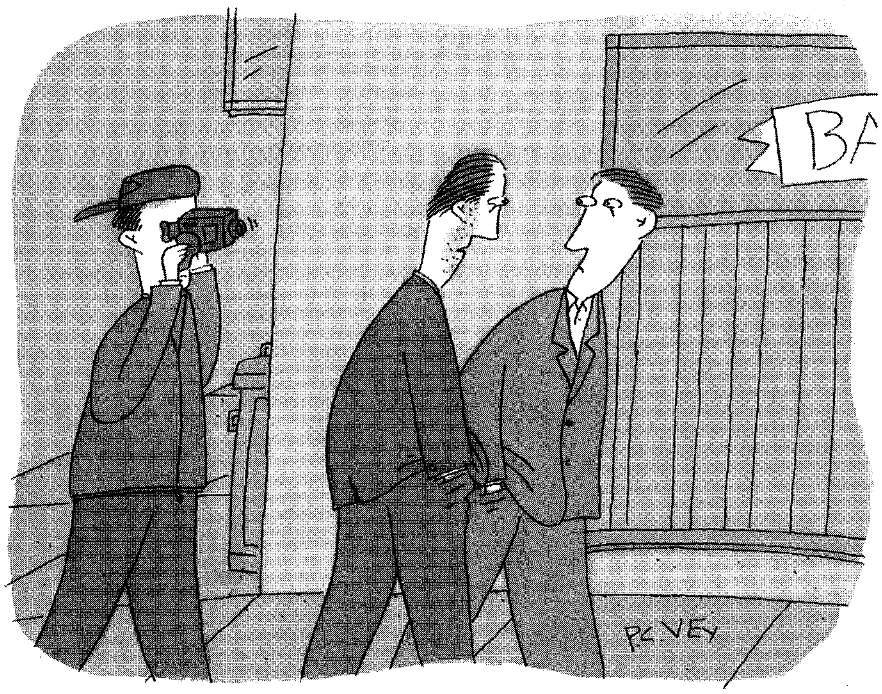
We did not foresee, that moment on the platform as the signal bells a half mile down the tracks warned of my train's approach, that within a decade passenger service to Philadelphia would stop, and that eventually the station, like stations all across the East, would be padlocked and boarded up. It stood on its empty acre of asphalt parking space like an oversized mausoleum. All the life it had once contained was sealed into silence, and for most of the rest of the century it ignominiously waited, in this city where progress was slow, to be razed.

But my father did foresee, the glitter

in his eyes told me, that time consumes us—that the boy I had been was dying if not already dead, and we would have less and less to do with each other. I had taken my life from his, and now I was stealing away with it. The train appeared, the engine, with its shining long connecting rods and high steel wheels, out of all proportion to the little soft bodies it dragged along. I boarded it. My parents looked smaller, foreshortened. We waved sheepishly through the smirched glass. I opened my book—"The Complete Poetical Works of John Milton"—before Alton's gritty outskirts had fallen away.

At the end of that long day of travel, getting off not at Boston's South Station but at Back Bay, one stop earlier and closer to Cambridge, I was met by my girlfriend. How swanky that felt, to read Milton all day, the relatively colorless and hard-to-memorize pentameters of "Paradise Regained," and, in sight of the other undergraduates disembarking, to be met and embraced on the platform by a girl—no, a woman—wearing a gray cloth coat, canvas tennis sneakers, and a ponytail. It must have been spring break, because if Deb was greeting me the vacation had been too short for her to go back and forth to St. Louis, where her home was. Instead, she had been waiting a week for me to return. She tended to underdress in the long New England winter, while I wore the heavy winter coat, with buckled belt and fleecy lining, that my parents had bought me, to my embarrassment, to keep me from catching colds up in New England.

—February 27, 2006



"That's Craig, my mockumentarist."

From a critical essay on late works

Death, one would think, naturally haunts late works; yet perhaps it does not. A negation defies objectification; disappearance has no appearance. Adorno wrote, "Death is imposed on created beings, not on works of art, and thus it has appeared in art only in a refracted mode, as allegory." What does haunt late works is the author's previous works: he is burdensomely conscious that he has been cast, unlike his ingénue self, as an author who writes in a certain way, with the inexorable consistency of his own handwriting. "I am tired of my own thoughts and fancies and my own mode of expressing them," Hawthorne wrote not many months before he died. Turning this way and that in his last creative torment, he kept meeting, with a shudder, his pet modes of imagining, chimeras on the fault line between the imaginary and the actual. Melville, no stranger to self-centered overcomplication, in old age found his way back to an earnest simplicity. Successful late works, shed of "obscuring puppy fat," tend to have a translucent thinness.

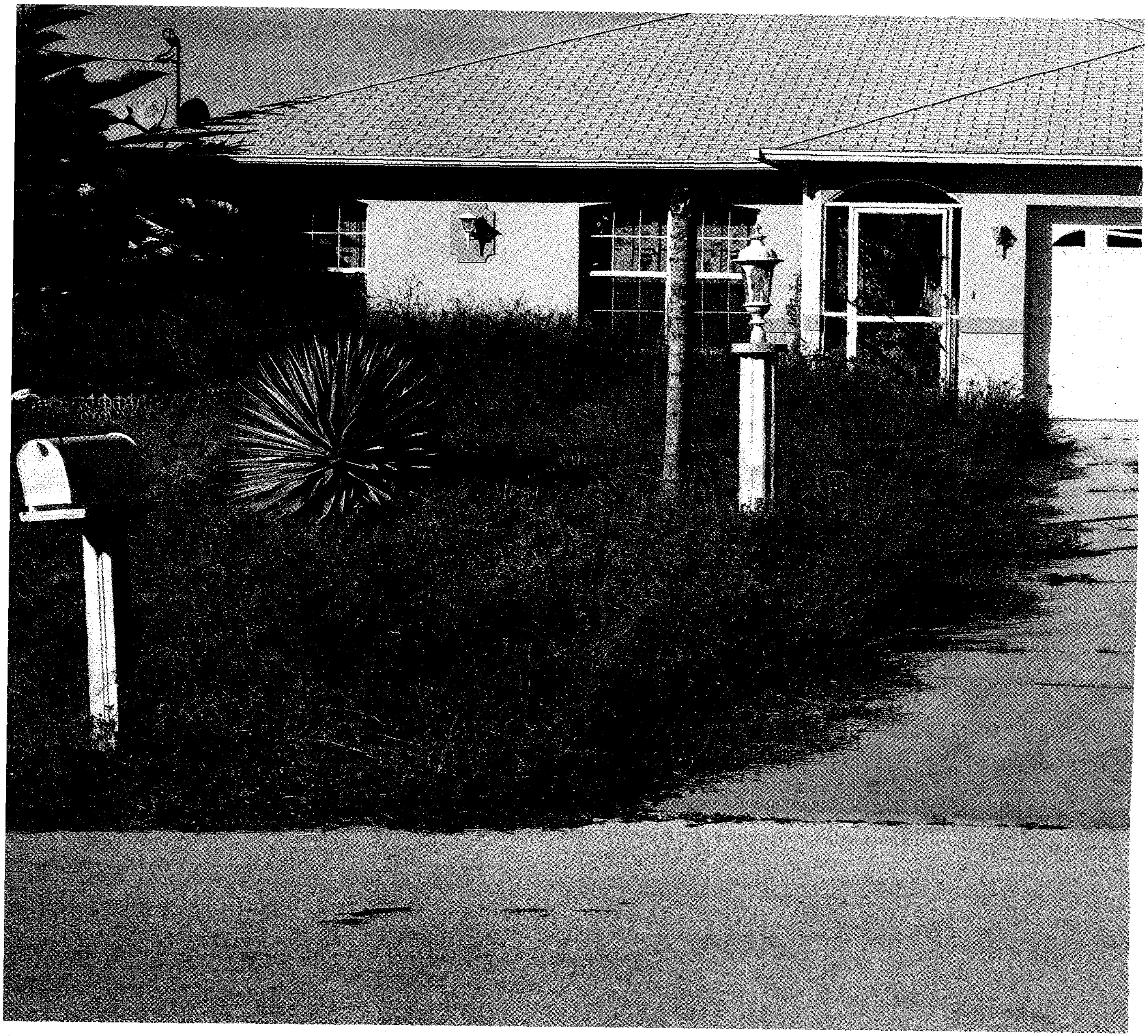
—August 7 & 14, 2006

From "The Full Glass"

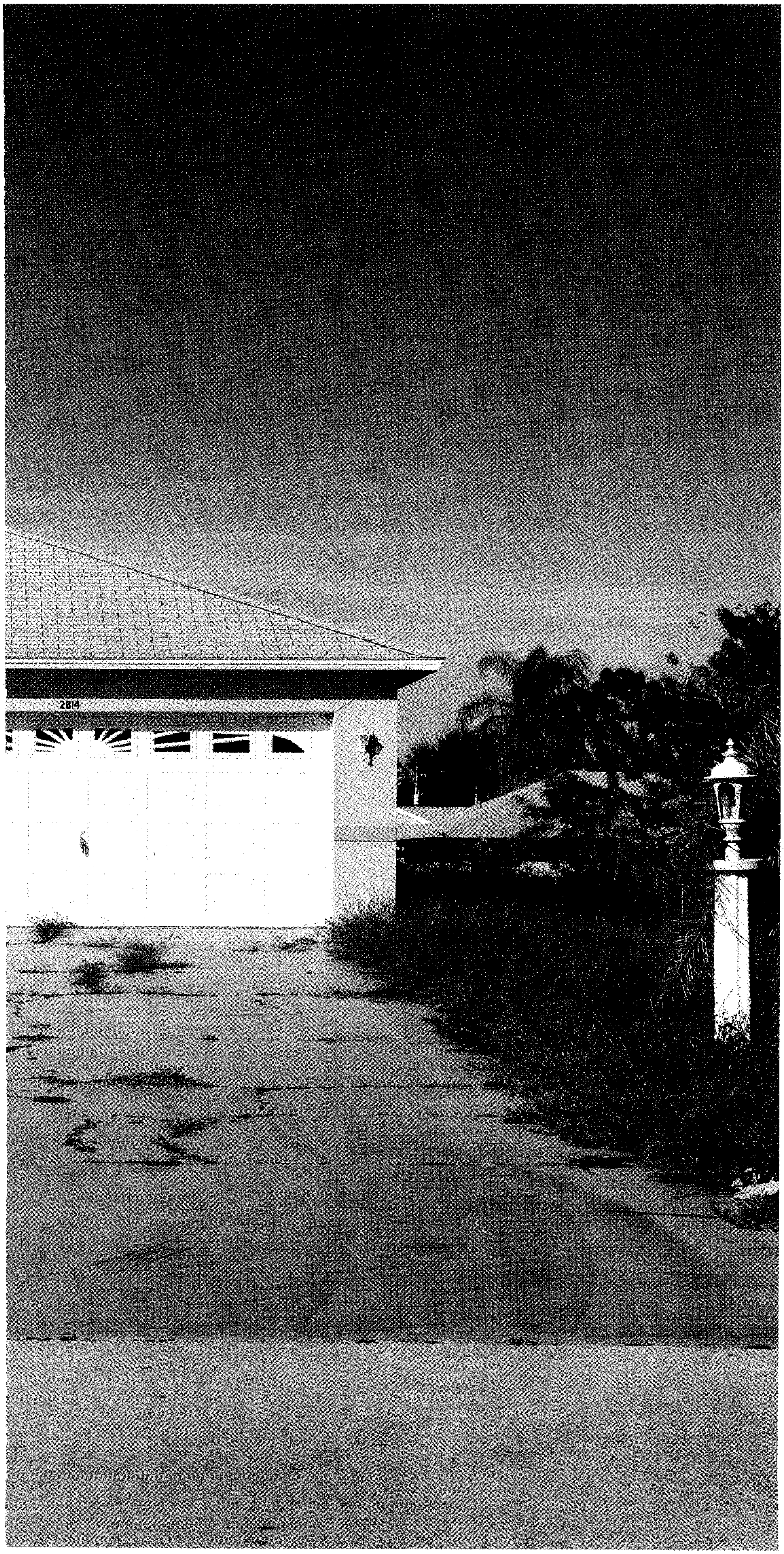
I disliked these country visits, so full, I thought, of unnecessary ceremony. My great-cousin was a dapper chicken farmer who by the time of our last visits had become noticeably shorter than I. He had a clean smell to him, starchy with a touch of liniment, and a closeted mustiness I notice now on my own clothes. With a sort of birdy animation he would faithfully lead me to the spring, down a path of boards slippery with moss from being in the perpetual damp shade of the droopy limbs of a great hemlock there. In my memory, beyond the shadows of the hemlock the spring was always in a ray of sunlight. Spidery water striders walked on its surface, and the dimples around their feet threw interlocking golden-brown rings onto the sandy bottom. A tin dipper rested on one of the large sandstones encircling the spring, and my elderly host would hand it to me, full, with a grin that was all pink gums. He hadn't kept his front teeth.

I was afraid of bringing a water strider up to my lips. What I did bring up held my nostrils in the dipper's wobbly circle of reflection. The water was cold, tasting brightly of tin, but not as cold as that which bubbled up in a corner of that small-town garage, the cement floor black with grease and the ceiling obscured by the sliding-door tracks and suspended wood frames holding rubber tires fresh from Akron. The rubber overhead had a smell that cleared your head the way a bite of licorice did, and the virgin treads had the sharp cut of metal type or newly ironed clothes. That icy water held an ingredient that made me, a boy of nine or ten, eager for the next moment of life, one brimming moment after another.

—May 26, 2008



A derelict home in Lehigh Acres, Florida. The state's chief financial officer says that Floridians are prone to speculation: "If it's too good t



e true, we're going to be involved in it." Photograph by Robert Polidori.

All along State Road 54 in Pasco County, Florida—forty-five minutes northeast of Tampa—the pine trees and palmettos and orange groves have been cleared to make way for new developments. Over the past few years, these inland subdivisions, which are sometimes called "boomburgs," appeared as if overnight. Developers dreamed up instant communities and christened them with names evoking the ease of English manor life: Ashton Oaks, Saddle Ridge Estates, the Hammocks at Kingsway. Across flat and empty fields of wire grass, the developers paved suburban streets and called them Old Waverly Court and Rolling Greene Drive. They parcelled out lots smaller than a quarter acre and built, with concrete blocks and stucco, look-alike two-story beige and yellow houses; columned archways over the front doors lent an illusion of elegance. The houses sold for two or three hundred thousand dollars to some of the thousand or so people who moved to Florida every day, or to middle-class people who already lived there but wanted to get farther away from Tampa, where most of them had jobs. Nearby, shopping malls and megachurches sprang up. By last year, Pasco County, where twenty thousand people lived in 1950, had nearly half a million residents. A few days after the Presidential election of 2004, the *Times* devoted an article to Pasco County, saying that it was the kind of place that had given Florida, and the White House, to George W. Bush. The county's growth fuelled a real-estate boom that, by the middle of this decade, was bigger and gaudier than anything the state had ever seen.

Recently, I drove around some of the subdivisions on State Road 54, as well as in other parts of Tampa Bay and in southwest Florida. A friend from Tampa, who accompanied me on one outing, called them "ghost subdivisions." I didn't understand what he meant until we drove into a development called Twin Lakes, where there was nobody on the gently curving streets except for a solitary middle-aged woman, who was watering her lawn in hip-hugging Capri jeans, a sleeveless top, and silvery-green eyeshadow. Her name was Bunny—"just Bunny"—and she was a native New Yorker who had grown up on Utopia Parkway, in Queens. She had pursued the sun and the good life to Hawaii, Arizona, and West Palm Beach, before ending up in Twin Lakes. Some of the houses around Bunny's were occupied, she said, but a good number were for sale. In the past two years, property values in Twin Lakes had dropped by more than a hundred thousand dollars. One house had been for sale for almost two years.

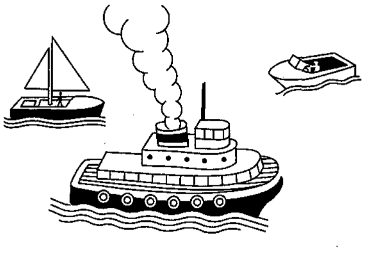
Farther east on State Road 54, in a subdivision called Country Walk, there were streets whose pavement stopped a few feet from where it began, as if the developer had changed his mind. I saw streets with signs and street lamps but no houses, and streets with houses but no occupants. Overhead, the sky was brilliant aquamarine, and the structures looked like cardboard cutouts. Dozens of houses had "For Sale" signs in the front yard, some of them standing next to collapsed inflatable Santa Clauses. On Pumpkin Ridge Road, house after house appeared to be waiting for inhabitants—carpeted white rooms with no furniture—or deserted. Five minutes after I rang the doorbell at one house, an old woman missing two front teeth opened her door a few inches and peered out. I asked where her neighbors had gone. "I don't know anything," she said. "I've only been here since October." In front of the house at the corner, three copies of the Tampa *Tribune*—one of them dated September 27th—lay on the pavers. I looked through the kitchen window: the refrigerator doors hung open and on the floor were piles of trash, including a sign that said "For Sale by Owner." The grass outside was overgrown, and yellow from a recent drought.

To the south, on a rural road off U.S. 301 in Hillsborough County, I turned in to a subdivision called Tanglewood Preserve. The sales center was shuttered and construction had been arrested: thirty-two lonely houses were scattered around three hundred and sixty-six lots, with patchy fields for back yards. At the corner of Tangle Brook Boulevard and Tangle Bend Drive, there was a two-story beige stucco house with a black Ford Explorer and a Chevy Venture parked in the driveway. A woman named Angie Harris lived there with her five children. She was thirty-six years old, a Navy veteran, black, with short hair and a stout, powerful body. She was the wife of a sailor stationed in Bahrain who was not due to return home until 2010. He had found the place in Tanglewood Preserve online, marked down from three hundred and twenty-six thousand dollars to two hundred and twenty-six thousand. "Go look," he told her. "There's something wrong, for that price." But there was nothing wrong, other than the head-high grass out back, and so Harris bought it and moved in this past July. She placed four leopard-skin-patterned chairs around a table in the dining nook and put a brown leatherette sofa set in the carpeted living room. When I visited, Harris's two younger daughters were watching cartoons on a large plasma television, with the volume low. On the kitchen counter were audio CDs of Dave Ramsey, a personal-finance adviser. Other than a few military plaques above the TV, the walls were bare. The blinds were drawn against the sunlight.

A group of original homeowners in the subdivision, who paid full price in 2006, had held a Thanksgiving get-together to which newcomers like Angie Harris, who had bought in for much less, were not invited. She knew the name of only one other family in Tanglewood Preserve—she'd heard it from the real-estate agent. "It used to be people would wave," she said, standing in her darkened living room in a "Verizon Wireless" sweatshirt and jeans. "Now they don't, maybe because of the economy. It used to be Southern hospitality. Now it's, like, grab your purse."

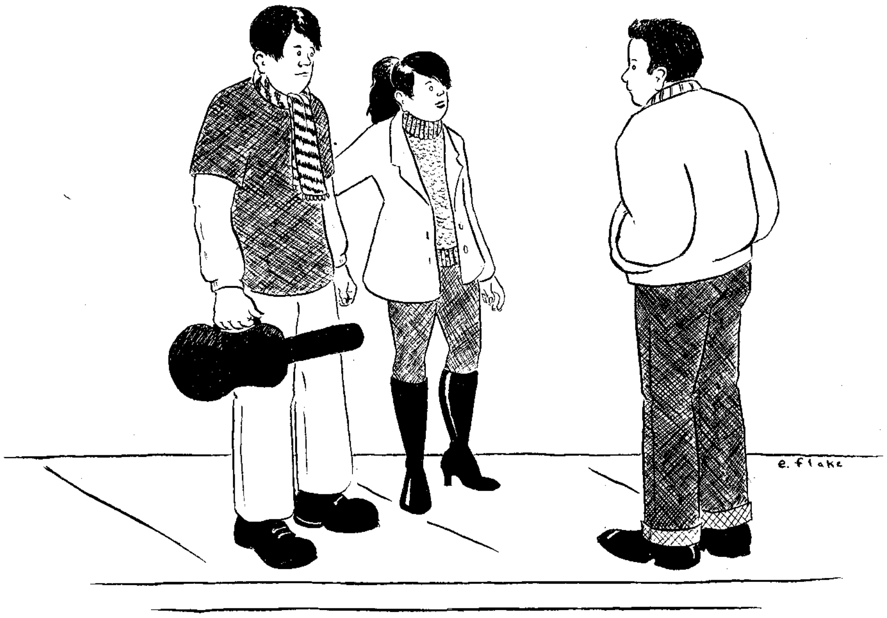
After the development went into foreclosure and was sold, Harris received a letter from the new developer. It said that the building of new houses remained on indefinite hold, but also promised better maintenance of the vacant lots, and included a gift certificate to Publix, the supermarket chain.

I asked Harris if she wanted a few more neighbors. "Not really," she said. "I want them to upkeep the property. And the playground they promised." She had annual passes to all the theme parks around Tampa for her five kids; when she moved in, her back yard was a breeding ground for snakes, the subdivision's common areas were not tended, and the open fields had become dumping grounds, so Harris seldom let her children play outside. She had grown up in Baltimore, where neighbors could spank one another's children, and had lived in Brooklyn, and she had fond memories of street life in those old cities. But at Tanglewood Preserve, Harris was filled with suspicion, as if transience and isolation made her vulnerable. (Valrico, the town a few miles to the northeast where she had lived before, was overcrowded and beset with gangs.) "When we moved to Florida, the auto insurance went up a hundred dollars. 'Florida is a fraudulent state'—that's how they explained it. I don't know if it's like that across the board. It's so much stuff that's going on—in this day and age, you can't trust people. The neighbors are leery of me, and maybe I'm leery of them."



On State Road 54, there was a gated community called Hamilton Park. Toward evening, a woman was sitting in her open garage, smoking and talking on the phone. A covered Corvette was parked in the driveway. Exposed to the darkening street, the woman resembled a figure on a lighted stage, an impression deepened by the theatrical amount of clutter surrounding her: pots and pans, Masonic emblems, Art Deco fireplace tools, a metal desk, an Army Air Corps scrapbook from the Second World War, a fiftieth-wedding-anniversary album, piles of photographs and letters, brown porcelain cannisters, a Kodak Brownie Reflex camera with external flashbulb, "The Good Housekeeping Cook Book."

"I'm liquidating everything at an auction," the woman said, after hanging up. Her name was Lee Gaither. She had been on the phone with Verizon, trying to keep her Internet service from being cut off. The water bill was past due, and Gaither, who was renting the house, was facing eviction. (To avoid it, she had sold off her mother's silverware, and some vintage furniture and jewelry, for thirteen hundred dollars.) Gaither, forty-seven years old, was slender and blond, with an educated voice; but her face was lined with exhaustion, and a scar ran under her left eye. She suffered from fibromyalgia, she said, and "something called lupus." Disability payments were her only income. She was from Ohio by way of Vir-



“Gabe’s in the Guitar Hero program at Juilliard.”

ginia, and around her lay the precious debris that her family had passed down to her, including a document dated March 11, 1830, transferring from Kentucky to Ohio the remaining balance of a Revolutionary War veteran’s pension. In November, 2007, after financial ruin forced her to sell the family house in Vienna, Virginia, she had moved to Florida. She apologized for the disorder in the garage. “These are family heirlooms,” Gaither explained. “I might get a little for it.”

Gaither traced her disaster to her third husband, whom she’d met in Virginia. “He asked me to marry him in three weeks, and that was a big thrill,” she said, with a hint of apology. She had invested her savings in the man’s construction business, which turned out to be fraudulent. He is currently in jail in Virginia. He had put two race trucks and the Corvette in her name, leaving her with payments of thirty-three hundred dollars a month. One truck had already been repossessed, and the second had been totalled by a man who borrowed it from her. She was still hoping to sell the Corvette, which carried a balance due of twenty-six thousand dollars. “I don’t have it,” Gaither said, in a tone of quiet defeat.

Gaither’s only consolation was her son from her second marriage. He was an A student at the local high school and hoped to attend law school. “I’m really proud of him, obviously,” Gaither said. “It’s too quiet here. I thought it’d be a great neighborhood for him, but he really has no friends to do things with.” Next door, a couple had moved in and then suddenly moved out again, and another couple was now renting.

Other than her son, there was no one, she said. “It would be nice to have living relatives,” she said. “My family home—everything is gone. And here I sit, wondering if I can get the phone company not to cut me off.” Pinned to the back wall of the garage was a small card with the words “PEACE: it does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble or hard work. It means to be in the midst of these things and still be calm in your heart.”

I had begun to think that Gaither was alone in Hamilton Park when a bright-red Hummer lumbered into her driveway, and a massive man with a long gray ponytail and a Harley T-shirt got out. He said that his name was Dan, and described himself as a friend who was helping Gaither out. Dan had a bass twang and a bone-crunching handshake. He was a retired state trooper and had been earning money serving subpoenas on foreclosures, until the high cost of gas made the business unprofitable. “It’s not their first rodeo, most of the people who are bailing,” Dan said, waving at the houses up and down the street, which were disappearing in the dusk. “The reason you don’t see ‘For Sale’ signs is they just pack up over the weekend and get out. They know the tricks to keep from getting traced.” He shrugged. “I’m going on credit cards myself. I took some of my retirement money and bought things I liked.” Dan nodded toward the Hummer. On his wrist was a Rolex watch.

Gaither was looking at a family picture, from 1942, of her father putting his Army Air Corps cap on her grandfather’s head. “There’s so much history here, and it’s heartbreaking,” she said. “But I just don’t have the time to sell it on eBay.” The auction would be held in two days. Gaither was trying to sell possessions of no value to anyone but her.

This is one of the places where the financial crisis began. Florida has epitomized the boom-and-bust cycle of American business ever since a land rush in the nineteen-twenties ended with the devastating hurricane of 1926. The state’s economy depends almost entirely on growth—that is, on new arrivals and the wealth they generate in construction and real estate. “Until two years ago, this was a growth machine that was the envy of the world,” said Gary Mormino, a professor of history at the University of South Florida, in St. Petersburg, which is across the bay from Tampa. “Florida, in some ways, resembles a modern Ponzi scheme. Everything is fine for me if a thousand newcomers come tomorrow. The problem is, except for a few road bumps—’73, ’90, and they were really minor—no one knew what would happen if they stopped coming.”

Only Nevada has a lower proportion of native residents than Florida. The state’s growth machine did not depend on higher education or high-paying professional jobs; it depended on real estate and sunshine. Tourism and migration allowed Florida to become a low-tax, low-wage state, where living was relatively cheap. “The Florida economy has been based on selling Florida,” David Reed, who runs the Florida operation of an investment fund called CapitalSouth Partners, said. “Our growth is all about population growth. When you take that away, what have you got?”

Florida is one of only nine states

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without an income tax—the state constitution bans it—and its taxes on corporations and financial transactions have been gutted with exemptions. The state depends for revenue on real-estate deals and sales taxes. In 2005, the LeRoy Collins Institute, at Florida State University, released a report warning that the state budget was overdependent on the housing boom and would soon experience deep shortfalls. Politicians in Tallahassee generally dismissed it. "Florida has a political culture, and one of its little phrases is 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it,'" Lance deHaven-Smith, a public-policy professor at Florida State, said. In exurban counties like Pasco, property taxes were kept low to attract homebuyers, and the schools and fire stations that new arrivals expected were often paid for with bond issues floated on the projection of future growth—a system that Ben Eason, who owns *Creative Loafing*, an alternative weekly in Tampa, also likened to a Ponzi scheme. DeHaven-Smith called Florida's policies "the most disingenuous system of government."

By 2005, the housing market in Florida was hotter than it had ever been, and the frenzy spread across all levels of society. Migrant farmworkers took jobs as roofers and drywall hangers in the construction industry. Nearly everyone you met around Tampa had a Realtor's license or a broker's license or was a title agent. Alex Sink, the state's chief financial officer and a Democrat, said, "When the yardman comes and says he's not going to mow your yard anymore because he's going to become a mortgage broker, that is a sure sign that something is wrong." Flipping houses and condominiums turned into an amateur middle-class pursuit. People who drew modest salaries at their jobs not only owned a house but bought other houses as speculators, the way average Americans elsewhere dabble in day trading. Ross Bauer, a manager at a Toyota dealership in Tampa, told me that between 2000 and 2007 he bought and sold half a dozen properties, in a couple of instances doubling his money within two years. "Looking back, it was right in our face," he said. "That's a heart attack. It's not normal."

Jim Thorner, a real-estate reporter in the Tampa office of the St. Petersburg *Times*, said, "There were secretaries with five to ten investment homes—a thirty-five-thousand-dollar salary and a million dollars in investments. There's no industry here, only houses." When Thorner went to buy a new house, in 2005, the customer ahead of him in line at the sales center said that he intended to turn his property around in six months and make fifty thousand dollars. It was not an outlandish plan. Home values around Tampa rose twenty-eight per cent that year. "I'm telling you, it was the Wild West," Alex Sink said. "And Florida has always been susceptible to the Wild West mentality. If it's too good to be true, we're going to be involved in it."

In Fort Myers and the neighboring city of Cape Coral, two hours south of Tampa, things got wilder than anywhere else. A Fort Myers real-estate agent named Marc Joseph, who entered the business right out of college, in 1990, and had the jaundiced eye of a veteran, told me, "Money was flowing, easy money. Anybody could qualify—I mean anybody." He knew a bank teller with an annual salary of twenty-three thousand dollars who had received a two-hundred-and-sixteen-thousand-dollar mortgage, with no money down and no income verification—not even a phone call from the lender. "I wish I could say the market here was driven by end users and retirees, but it wasn't. Two-thirds were speculators. You could flip 'em before you had to close on 'em." Karen Johnson-Crowther, another real-estate agent in Fort Myers, showed me the sales history of a property in an upscale gated community which she had recently bought at a foreclosure auction. Building had begun in 2005. On December 29, 2005, the house sold for $399,600. On December 30, 2005, it sold for $589,900. On June 25, 2008, it was foreclosed on. Johnson-Crowther bought it in December for $325,000. I said that the one-day increase in value must have been some kind of record, and she looked at me pityingly: "No."

When I told Alex Sink about the house that had appreciated by almost fifty per cent overnight, she said, "That's a fraudulent transaction." According to an investigative series in the Miami *Herald*, oversight by the state's Office of Financial Regulation and its commissioner, Don Saxon, was so negligent that more than ten thousand convicted criminals got jobs in the mortgage business, including four thousand as licensed brokers, some of whom engaged in fraudulent deals. Until the rules were recently changed, felons in Florida lost the right to vote but could still sell mortgages. (Under pressure from Sink, Saxon resigned this past August.) Kathy Castor, Tampa's representative in Congress, told me, "Florida was particularly lax when it comes to mortgage regulation.” She connected the mortgage crisis and the lack of oversight with state politics and the political power of developers. “We were hit by two Bushes, George and Jeb”—Florida’s governor from 1998 to 2006—“and there was very loose growth management. Because Jeb was aligned with the development industry, it was a speculator’s paradise.” Before running for Congress, in 2006, Castor was a commissioner in Hillsborough County. She said that developers held sway there, benefitting from “a very costly urban-sprawl model.” The county sold off agricultural land “in places that are miles from the jobs.” The Web site for Country Walk, in Pasco County, promised buyers “a comfortable distance from the higher prices, taxes, and congestion of big city living. Come enjoy the home Tampa residents can only dream about.”

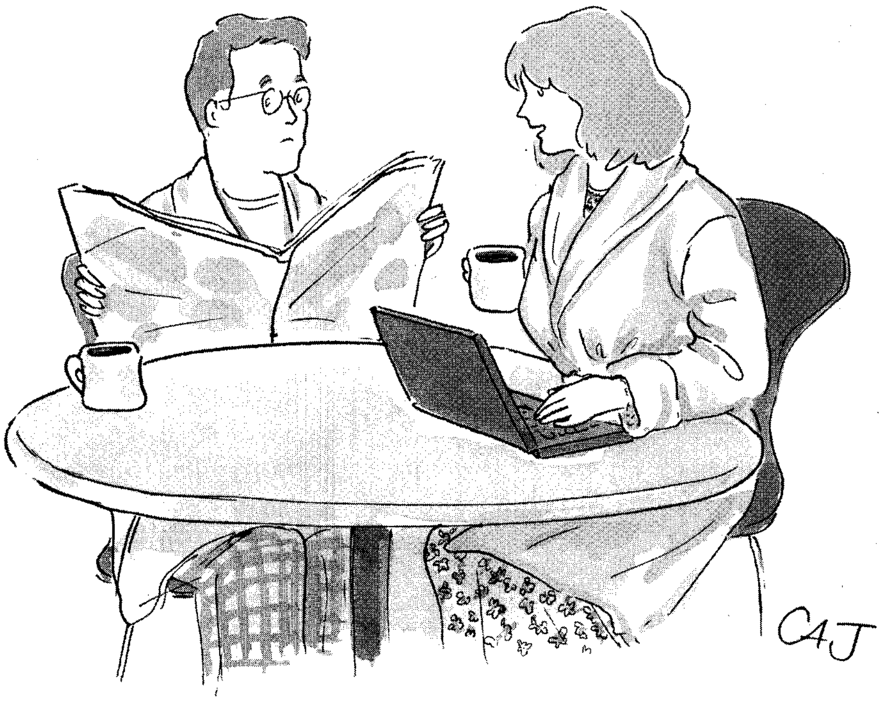
Last fall, Michael Van Sickler, of the St. Petersburg *Times*, tracked the real-estate deals of a local tattoo-parlor owner named Sang-Min Kim, also known as Sonny. Starting in 2004, Sonny Kim made ninety sales around Tampa, mostly in poor neighborhoods, on which he cleared four million dollars. Van Sickler found that many of Kim’s buyers, who put little or no money down, were untraceable; some had been convicted of drug dealing and other crimes. Kim, who has not been charged with any crimes and could not be reached for this article, closed a third of his deals with a title agent named Howard Gaines, who now faces up to forty-five years in prison on a fraud conviction elsewhere in Florida. According to law-enforcement experts, drug dealers often become flippers, in order to launder money.

One night in December, Van Sickler took me on a tour of some of the abandoned and foreclosed properties that had once belonged to Sonny Kim’s real-estate empire. We stopped at an ill-lit corner in a mostly black slum of single-family houses called Belmont Heights, which is cut off from downtown Tampa by Interstate 4. Van Sickler—incongruous-looking in a dress shirt and dark slacks—pointed out a decaying two-story stucco house. Its windows were boarded up, and mattresses lay in the overgrown yard, near a “For Sale” sign. Van Sickler learned that Kim acquired the house in 2006 with a deed that was witnessed by a convicted drug dealer, then flipped it for the sum of three hundred thousand dollars, with the help of a no-money-down mortgage from a subsidiary of Washington Mutual Bank, which later foreclosed on the house. (Last year, WaMu went into receivership, after becoming the largest bank failure in American history.) According to mortgage-fraud experts, the straw buyer is typically paid a small slice of the flipper’s take and then disappears without moving in. When Van Sickler recently asked a real-estate agent about the house, he was told, “That’s selling for fifty-two thousand, but it can be yours for thirty-five thousand in cash.”

“Sonny Kim may not be the biggest, he may not be the worst, but he really epitomizes the laxness of the banks during the boom years,” Van Sickler said as we stood outside the house. “It raises the question, Did anyone from the bank do a drive-by to eyeball this place?” Kim’s deals had been financed by Wachovia, Wells Fargo, Bank of America, Lehman Brothers, Fannie Mae, and Freddie Mac. While Van Sickler, who was having trouble selling his own house in Tampa, was investigating the trail of Sonny Kim in September, the country plunged into the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, and the banks that had greased Kim’s deals were at the center of it. “We’re not *all* to blame for this,” Van Sickler said. “Decisions were made, and people looked the other way. This did go all the way up the ladder.”

Van Sickler was right: the diagram of moral responsibility looked like an inverted pyramid, with the lion’s share belonging to the banks, mortgage lenders, regulators, and politicians at the top. And yet anyone buying and selling property in Florida in the middle of the decade must have known that the system was essentially a confidence game, that everyone involved was both being taken and taking someone else. Easy credit and mistrust are two sides of the same economy. This explained, at least in part, why Angie Harris avoided her neighbors in Tanglewood Preserve, and why they shunned her: she made them feel that they’d been duped. A Ponzi scheme succeeds only when enough people are willing to put aside common sense, and on some level they know they are doing it. The result is universal credulousness and universal fear.

A Tampa police car pulled up outside the derelict house, and a cop got out. “Someone around here doesn’t like you,”



“I was going to wake you up with oral sex this morning, but you looked like you could use the extra sleep.”

he said. A neighbor had complained about two men snooping around the abandoned property.

Flipping and fraud burst the boil. But in places like Pasco County and Cape Coral it was the ordinary desire of ordinary people to buy their own homes that turned things septic. Southwest Florida isn't Las Vegas or Palm Beach: this is conservative, churchgoing country, with anti-abortion signs scattered among the highway billboards advertising model homes and liposuction. Unlike the upscale Atlantic Coast of Florida, it was settled by middle- and working-class people who followed the I-75 trail down from Michigan, Ohio, and other places that nurtured Midwestern frugality and caution. The memory of these values haunts conversations about what happened here. Karen Johnson-Crowther, the real-estate agent in Fort Myers, who bought five houses at one Sunday auction in December, said, "You open the paper and read the foreclosures in the back of the classified section—you can't help but feel for all of those people who wanted the American dream." Johnson-Crowther, the mother of grown children, comes from Illinois. "My parents were always savers," she said. "My father was an asphalt contractor up there. He retired here because he saved. Today, we're so different from that generation. After seeing this, is it going to swing back the other way?"

Anita Lux also came from Michigan. She and her husband, Richard, live in a one-story house along a canal in Ponderosa Shores, a quiet older subdivision of St. Petersburg. Her father worked at Ford's Rouge River plant in Dearborn, Michigan, for forty-seven years, long enough to have known Henry Ford and Walter Reuther. Anita had a job with the city of Dearborn until 1985, when Richard, an architect, accepted an offer to start a new office in Florida. They wanted to get away from the winters.

The Luxes invited me for coffee out on their screened-in porch overlooking the canal. Richard, in his early sixties, was bearded with thinning hair; Anita, who was in her late fifties, had large, heavily mascaraed eyes behind glasses.

"Her father was very frugal," Richard said. "All of this rubbed off on Anita. Anita has been known as the Coupon Queen."

"You know how they tell you at the end of the receipt how much you've saved?" Anita said. "I love that!" She added, "We've always tried to live not beyond our means. We have credit cards, but not maxed out. One or two cards." They saved for two years in order to take a vacation to Yellowstone. "We don't have big-screen TVs. We don't have fancy cars." They owned a Ford and a Mercury. "Bought used," she added.

When the recession of the late eighties caused Richard's office to close, Anita took a job as an administrative assistant at Wachovia. Earlier this decade, she watched the bank get into the subprime-loan business. In 2006, Wachovia bought World Savings, a California mortgage lender operating under the umbrella of Golden West Financial, which that year was named by *Fortune* as one of the most admired mortgage-services companies in America.

"Who would have thought that all those loans would cause . . ." Anita didn't finish her sentence. At World Savings, the loans were called "Pick a Pay." Customers were invited to design their own mortgages, choosing an interest rate and a payment plan. "They were going to have all the lenders for Wachovia follow the same scheme" as World Savings, she recalled. "A lot of our mortgage lenders thought this was pretty nutty. But World Savings was pretty successful, for a while."

"For its owners," Richard added.

"He saw all this coming," Anita said.

"What triggered it for me was all these high-rise condos for a million dollars," Richard said. "In Tampa, in St. Pete. Who in the world can afford those? This is Podunk. This isn't Chicago, this isn't Paris. Who is dumping all this money?" Anita smiled—they knew each other's conversational turns—as Richard went on: "We changed as a society. Prior to the concept of the government getting into the lottery business, we were a nation built on the value of a dollar. We became a nation based on the *volume* of the dollar."

"Part of the problem is they allowed people to have too much credit," Anita said. "Every day, you get something in the mail that says you've been preapproved for a credit card, and people don't know how to say no. You've got people with thirty credit cards."

"Then people compound it—they get a line of credit to pay their taxes," Richard said. "The American people don't have an education in money. They didn't learn it from their parents."

Alex Sink, the state treasurer, was president of Bank of America in Florida until she retired in 2000, just before her colleagues started to lose their bearings. "What were the banks thinking?" she asked. "My alma-mater bank, one of their early write-offs—they came up with this idea that they were going to make lines of credit up to a hundred thousand dollars available to small businesses without any history. You know, the Kevin Cate Tattoo Parlor." (Kevin Cate is Sink's press secretary, and though he has a real-estate license, like everyone else in Florida, he doesn't own a tattoo parlor.) On a recent visit to Bank of America headquarters, in Charlotte, North Carolina, Sink confronted one of the bank's most senior executives. "I said, 'What were you thinking?' He just looked at me. He thought they'd outsmarted themselves."

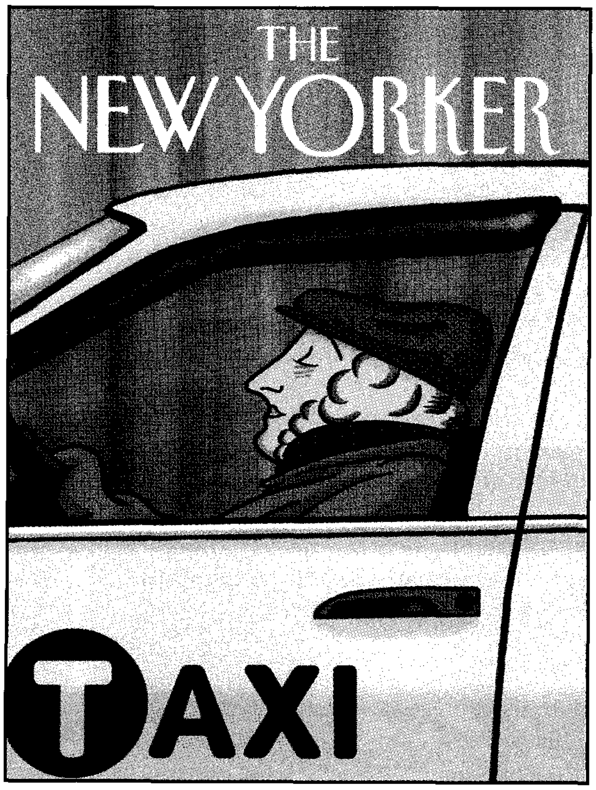
In 2003, Jennifer Formosa and her husband, Ron, bought a house in Cape Coral, across the Caloosahatchee River from Fort Myers. Until the late fifties, Cape Coral didn't exist, except as an uninhabited spit of land called Redfish Point. In 1957, two salesmen from Baltimore, Leonard and Julius Rosen, bought it for six hundred and seventy-eight thousand dollars, gave it a more alluring name, and began pitching their new development on television. In "Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams: A Social History of Modern Florida," Gary Mormino, the historian, writes, "The first national ads for Cape Coral offered shivering Northerners the opportunity to buy into the Florida dream on the installment plan." Today, a hundred and sixty-seven thousand people live there.

Jennifer Formosa, who is twenty-five, with brown hair and a practical manner, came from Michigan, like Anita Lux, but she was raised by a single mother and moved to Florida when she was nine. A month after graduating

PORTFOLIO

THE EUSTACE VARIATIONS

For the second year, we held a contest on our Web site to elicit alternative guises for Eustace Tilley, the magazine's dandified mascot. The four below are among the winning entries, more of which can be seen on newyorker.com.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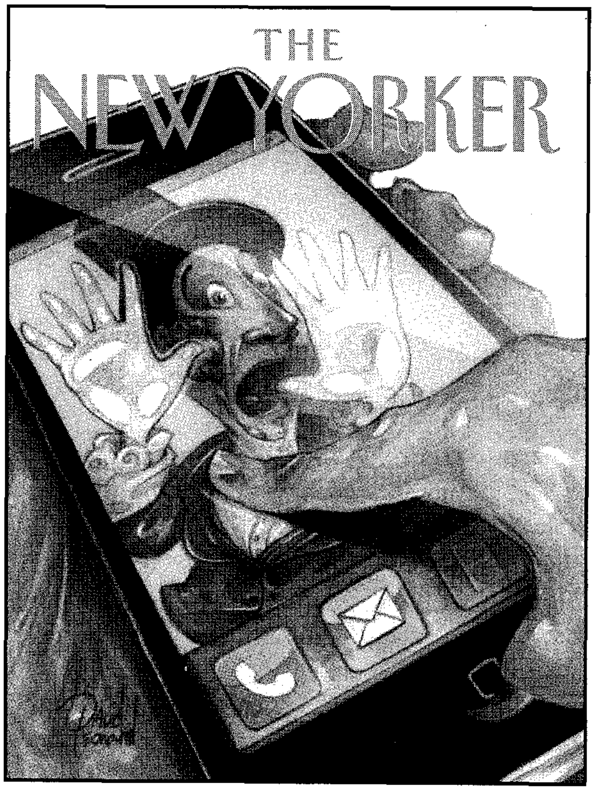
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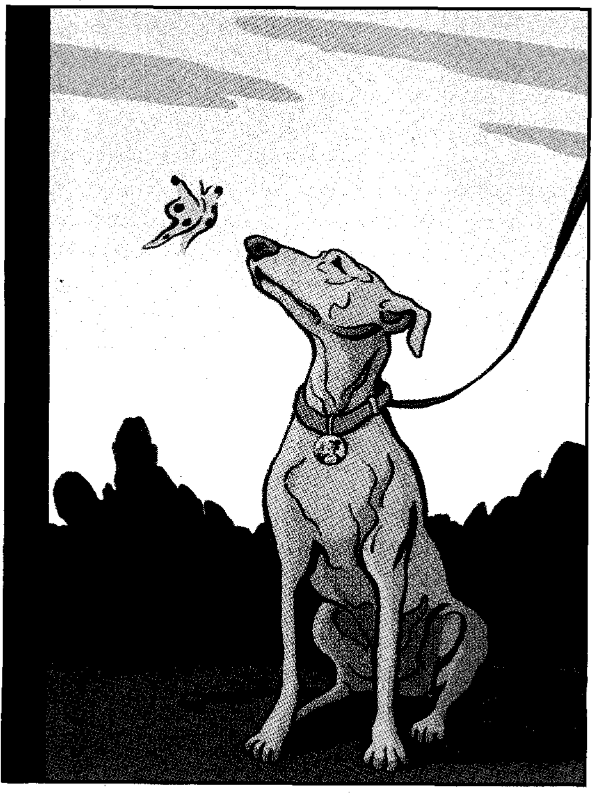
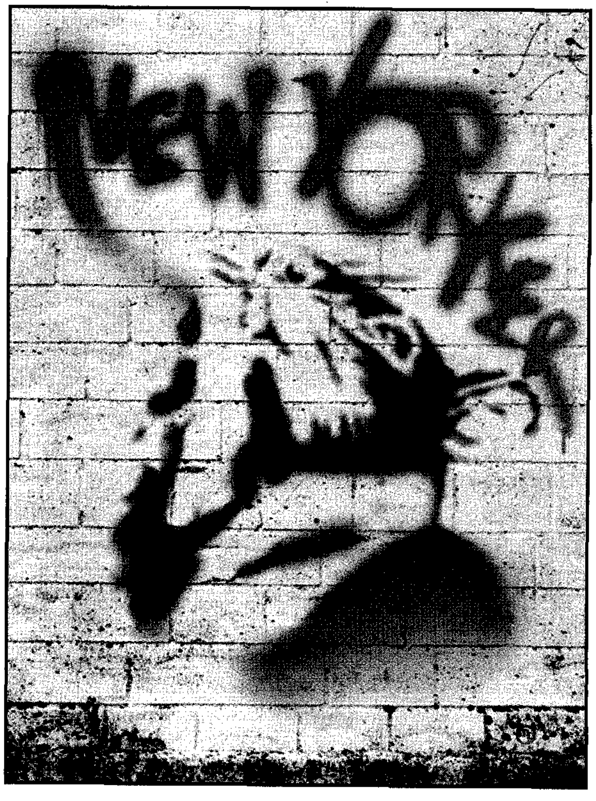




CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: ERIC ALMENDRAL, DAVID LEONARD, MARCUS THIELE, GARY AMARO

IN THE ATTIC

1.
Like Jim Hawkins aloft in the crosstrees
Of Hispaniola, nothing underneath him
But still green water and clean bottom sand,

The ship aground, the canted mast far out
Above a seafloor where striped fish pass in shoals—
And when they've passed, the face of Israel Hands

That rose in the shrouds before Jim shot him dead
Appears to rise again . . . "But he was dead enough,"
The story says, "being both shot and drowned."

2.
A birch tree planted twenty years ago
Comes between the Irish Sea and me
At the attic skylight, a man marooned

In his own loft, a boy
Shipshaped in the crow's nest of a life,
Airbrushed to and fro, wind-drunk, braced

By all that's thrumming up from keel to masthead,
Rubbing his eyes to believe them and this most
Buoyant, billowy, topgallant birch.

from high school, she went to work as a teller with BankAtlantic. (In the state's employment hierarchy, the lower-middle-class job for those without a college education was bank teller. For men who didn't finish high school, it was construction. The middle class worked as real-estate agents and brokers. The upper class were developers.) At nineteen, Jennifer had her first child with Ron, whom she met in high school. They've since married and had a second child. Ron, who has the short haircut and earnest look of a fifties jock, was abandoned by his parents and raised by a grandmother. He didn't finish high school, and went to work pouring cement in the construction industry around Cape Coral and Fort Myers. At the height of the building boom, he was making thirty dollars an hour. ("I was thinking, I don't need no diploma.") Using Jennifer's income of about twenty thousand a year and Ron's sweat equity as a down payment, they took out a hundred-and-ten-thousand-dollar mortgage and began construction on a three-bedroom house in Cape Coral. To pay their bills, they refinanced with Washington Mutual, then took out an equity line.

"Our hundred-thousand-dollar house got up to two hundred eighty thousand," Ron said.

"With the final equity line, we put the patio in, paid off the cars, and bought the boat," Jennifer said.

"Blew some of it," Ron admitted.

"Vacations, cruises," Jennifer said matter-of-factly. "Going to Orlando, taking the kids to Disney."

By 2006, even though the Formosas had almost no savings, and kept borrowing against the value of their house—with its apparently endless path upward—their position seemed pretty solid. At least they didn't have an adjustable-rate mortgage, with no money down and a low teaser rate that would soar in two years.

I met the Formosas through Marc Joseph, the Fort Myers real-estate agent. He was a cheerful booster of his home town and his trade, but he also wanted me to know the local roots of the financial crisis and the human faces behind it. "A lot of it originated right here, with greed and easy money, greed and easy money. That was the germ. It wasn't location, location, location—it was greed and easy money."

And then it all came to an end.

Some people in Florida can identify the precise moment when the economy turned. "It was almost like somebody had turned the light switch off," Karen Johnson-Crowther said. Marc Joseph remembered a week in December, 2005, when the median price per unit in Fort Myers and Cape Coral was at its high of three hundred and twenty-two thousand dollars, and suddenly the phone wasn't ringing as much. "It was as if the car came to a stop and all the air went out of the tires," he recalled. For real-estate agents like Johnson-Crowther and Joseph, who stood on the precipice of Florida's economy, the plunge to today's depth started earliest and was steepest. For other Floridians, the past few years have been a slow agony of contraction.

When, at the Florida market's dizzying mid-decade height, speculators lost confidence, the faith that kept the state aloft gave way and the economy plummeted like a Looney Tunes character who, suspended in midair, suddenly looks down. Property values did what the lenders and borrowers somehow never imagined was possible: they started to decline. Today, the average unit in Fort Myers and Cape Coral is selling for just a hundred and fifty-eight thousand dollars, less than half of what it sold for at its height. When housing prices dropped, owners like the Formosas could no longer use their homes as cash machines. Even luxury properties, usually insulated from downturns, took big hits: in St. Petersburg, a real-estate agent named Alona Dishy showed me a waterfront house that had originally been advertised for $4.4 million but sold for $2.4 million. With fewer interested buyers, the volume of new building decreased, and the construction industry began to dry up.

In Naples, the wealthy retirement community south of Fort Myers, Ron Labbe owned a lumberyard that sold materials to the town's high-end builders. Labbe, who came from a working-class family in Akron, Ohio, had started out driving a forklift in the yard thirty

3.
Ghost-footing what was then the *terra firma*
Of hallway linoleum, Grandfather now appears
Above me just back from the matinée,

His voice awaver like the draft-prone screen
They'd set up in the Club Rooms earlier.
"And Isaac Hands," he asks, "was Isaac in it?"

His memory of the name awaver, too,
His mistake perpetual, once and for all,
Like the single splash when Israel's body fell.

4.
As I age and blank on names,
As my uncertainty on stairs
Is more and more the light-headedness

Of a cabin boy's first time on the rigging,
As the memorable bottoms out
Into the irretrievable,

It's not that I can't imagine still
That slight untoward rupture and world-tilt
As a wind freshened and the anchor weighed.

—*Seamus Heaney*

years ago, and in 2005 he bought out the company's owners with the help of CapitalSouth Partners, David Reed's investment fund. In the summer of 2006, Labbe noticed a sudden drop in building permits around Naples—a warning sign in the construction trade. He cut his workforce, then closed his truss-fabrication plant, sold off the plant's equipment and land, and waited for the downward spiral to stop. But it kept going. Labbe's water coolers were replaced with drinking fountains. The company shrank from two hundred employees to forty, and revenue dropped from fifty million dollars in 2006 to sixteen million in 2008. This past summer, Labbe—a self-deprecating, meticulous sixty-year-old—stopped paying himself and put his own cash back into the business. When I visited the lumberyard, on January 7th, he told me that it was the worst single day of sales he had ever had. And there was no end in sight. I asked whom he blamed for the wasting away of his company. Labbe shook his head and smiled. "There are big forces out there that are much larger than we are," he said. "It would just eat away at you if you think about what's happening now." He added, "There's not one thing you have to blame. You'd have to blame everyday people. What's the saying? I met the enemy, and it's us."

By early 2008, the cement company where Ron Formosa worked in Cape Coral started laying guys off. Ron first saw his hours cut in half, and then he lost his job. At the same time, interest rates crept upward, which meant that borrowers who were already watching their income and property values melt away had an even harder time making monthly payments.

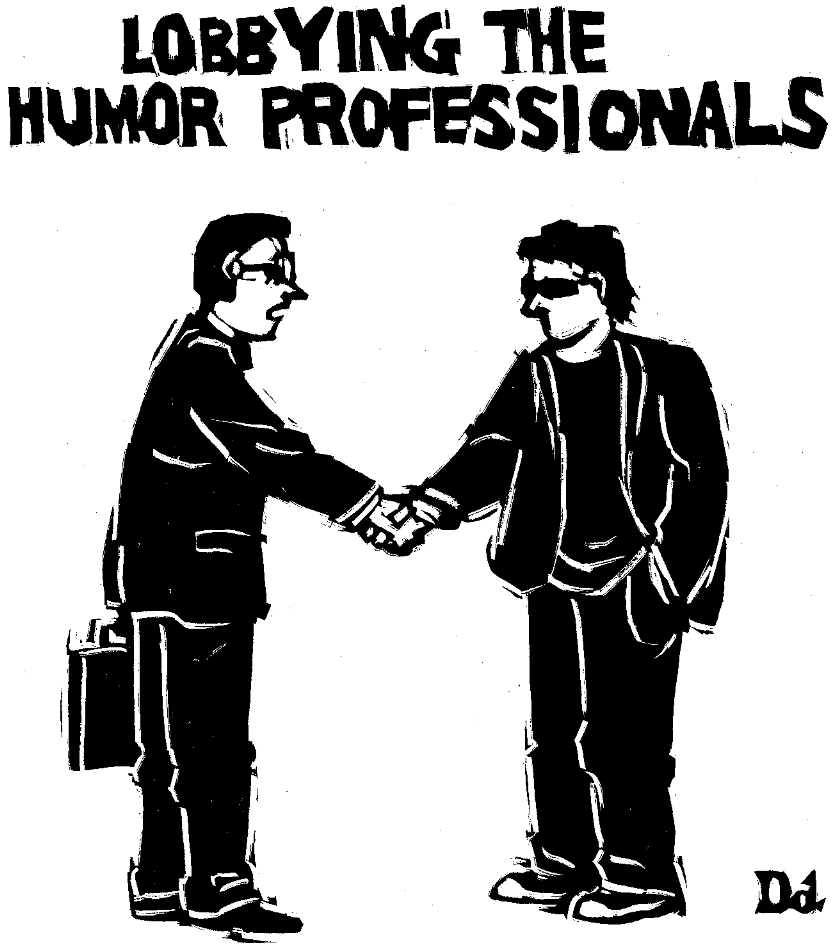
Thus the foreclosure epidemic began. By last year, the highest rate in the country could be found in Fort Myers and Cape Coral, where twelve per cent of the area's residences were in foreclosure, including the Formosas'. In Tampa, a third of the properties sold by Sonny Kim passed into the hands of some of the country's leading banks, which had lent millions of dollars to his straw buyers without asking questions. In Pasco County, the foreclosure rate jumped fivefold between 2005 and 2008. And in New York and Washington the term "mortgage-backed securities" came to inspire dread, like the name of a new virus. Having incubated along the Gulf Coast of Florida, it was spreading around the world.

But this was only the beginning of Florida's calamity. In early 2007, Alex Sink attended a meeting of the Chamber of Commerce in Tallahassee, where an official from Allied Van Lines reported that the company was moving more people out of Florida than in. "That really got people's attention," she said. "It's even worse now." In the 2003-04 fiscal year, Florida's population grew by nearly four hundred thousand. The projection for 2009 is five thousand, making it the first year since the early seventies, when statistics began to be recorded, in which the net flow of migration is negligible. Residential electrical hookups show the same trend: preliminary numbers suggest a decline in 2008, the first decrease in the four decades since the Bureau of Economic and Business Research at the University of Florida has been keeping the data. The engine of Florida's growth has quit. In Gary Mormino's metaphor, the Ponzi scheme has collapsed.

Because real estate stands at the center of the state's economy, very little in Florida survived the bust intact. A harbor pilot named Jorge Viso told me that at the port of Tampa, where the bulk of the traffic is in construction materials, the volume of shipping had imploded over the past two years—steel was down by sixty-seven per cent, cement by seventy-three, wood products by eighty-nine. It was the worst decrease in his two decades there. Ross Bauer, the Toyota manager who sold properties on the side, said that the car dealership had enjoyed double-digit increases throughout the decade. "Business was insane," he said. In 2007, sales levelled off. In 2008, they dropped precipitately. Twenty per cent of auto sales were paid off through home equity, Bauer said, and now a fifth of the vehicles financed by Toyota's southeastern distributorship were in repossession. In the final months of 2008, half a dozen auto dealerships in Tampa closed or declared bankruptcy.

The construction workers who had scaled the economic ladder from the strawberry fields and orange groves began sliding back down. Latino farmworkers without houses or families in Florida boarded buses bound for Mexico. The Hillsborough County sheriff reported tent villages full of the homeless sprouting behind strip malls, along with an outbreak of strange new crimes. Carl Grooms, a strawberry grower in Plant City, explained, "The economic situation is so bad that you've got a low-rent element coming in that will steal anything. They steal our copper from our churches, they strip the wiring out of the trailers." Jim Joyce, a supervisor with Hillsborough County's health and social-services department, said that his caseworkers were seeing "a new face" coming in for help: "People who were in their homes, were living the American dream, and then lost it. And they don't have the knowledge to navigate social services, how to get food stamps. People who were employed in the real-estate market—we see people who were making quite a nice living, and they end up in our office." Unemployment in Hillsborough County was close to eight per cent, and retailers in the strip malls were closing down. Tampa was awash in out-of-work brokers and busted developers. On the streets outside his condo, Ross Bauer began to see something new: homeless people who looked like him.

In Room 416 of the George E. Edgecomb Courthouse, in downtown Tampa, Laura Donaldson, twice divorced, was having another face-off with her first husband, Dennis Johnson. They were both in their forties, both blond, both good-looking, though a little drawn around the eyes and mouth—she in a navy-blue blazer, he in a yellow button-down shirt. It was easy to imagine the couple, in better times, out on the emerald bay together, in the boat whose valuation became a subject of argument at their divorce hearing, in 2001. Johnson was a property developer—his niche was subdividing and flipping empty lots in the wealthy areas of South Tampa—and in 2005 he earned eight hundred and thirty thousand dollars, by far his career high, after which his ex-wife demanded a second increase in support payments for their son.



"So from now on the rabbi, the priest, and the minister all walk into a pharmacy, O.K.?"

By the time the case came before Judge Bernard C. Silver, of the Hillsborough County Circuit Court, Johnson's fortunes had taken a disastrous turn—two straight years of deficits, totalling more than three hundred thousand dollars. He had fired his secretary, sold his million-dollar house at a loss, moved his new family into a rental, and was paying bills and debts with credit cards, stock sales, a loan from his in-laws, and proceeds from his business properties, which were losing value every month and which he was liquidating as quickly as possible. He had plotted a graph to show the judge, labelled "Declining Net Worth." The line began in May, 2006, at $3,759,000, and descended, first gradually, then steeply, to last August: $220,500.

And yet, on the witness stand, Johnson parried his ex-wife's lawyer with the almost jaunty equanimity of a ruined man in a screwball comedy. Once or twice, without knowing who I was, he caught my eye and shook his head with a grin. "It appears right now there's a multitude of people with my expertise out there," Johnson said when questioned whether he was looking for work. "Everybody's been laid off. I'm a cheap commodity right now." His ex-wife's lawyer, Adrian Castro, kept suggesting that Johnson had money hidden away, and Johnson kept answering with the verbal equivalent of turning out his pockets and shrugging. It seemed as if he'd finally found a way to keep his ex-wife's hands off his money.

"Your net worth drops three million dollars in one year, and that's not your big problem," Johnson said later, over lunch at Pipo's Cuban Café. "I'd take three more years of real-estate hell if my lawyer could get me out of court."

I thought of Lee Gaither, sitting amid the detritus of her life in a garage up in Pasco County. Gaither had said that her ex-husband was "an incredible actor," and now the only thing of value she owned was a red Corvette. Johnson had a white Lexus. He also owned an interest in a piece of property in Pasco County—twenty acres of orange groves and a pretty lake, north of the developments along State Road 54. When the economy recovered, the orange groves could be subdivided and developed. He was going to hold on to them—he was still in the game.

At a table outside a Tampa Starbucks, Ross Bauer, the Toyota dealer, was sipping a latte and smoking in the December afternoon sun, wearing an Abercrombie & Fitch T-shirt, sunglasses, and a few days' stubble. "I personally laid off thirty guys in the last ninety days," he said. "It was brutal. I had to let a guy go who worked there for many years. His wife was sick. 'Did I do something wrong?' 'No.' 'Does someone not like me?' 'No.' The bottom line was he was a highly compensated person we could do without."

Then it was Bauer's turn. "I was a victim of my own cost-cutting," he said.

When we met, Bauer had been unemployed for three weeks. He admitted that he enjoyed sleeping in and was delaying the moment when he would go looking for a new job. He had stopped shopping at Nordstrom's, and no longer dined out at Ruth's Chris Steak House. In his condo, there was an expensive Viking gas stove that he'd turned on only two or three times, because he hardly ever cooked. "I never thought about it—it was just how I lived," he said. "And it just stopped. Now you go to Hooters for a burger and a beer."

Bauer's condo, which he'd bought for half a million dollars at the peak, was currently worth maybe three hundred thousand, and he was negotiating a short sale with the bank to avoid foreclosure. Nearby, the streets were deserted around the Towers at Channelside—twin twenty-nine-story luxury high-rises, built in the past two years in a warehouse district near the port. At the end of last year, the project nearly went bankrupt. At night, the Towers themselves looked nearly empty, almost all the windows dark, except for a string of Christmas lights halfway up one tower and the blue light of a television flickering in the other.

When Anita Lux worked in the complaints office of Dearborn's public-utilities department, a framed quotation hung on the wall, next to the time clock. She could still recite it word for word a quarter century later, as we drank coffee on her screened-in porch by the canal:

> If you work for a man, for heaven's sake work for him: speak well of him and stand by the institution he represents. Remember, an ounce of loyalty is worth a pound of cleverness. If you must growl, condemn, and eternally find fault, why not resign your position? And when you are on the outside damn to your heart's content, but as long as you are part of the institution, do not condemn it. If you do, the first high wind that comes along will blow you away and you will never know why.

It came from an essay by Elbert Hubbard, a popularizer of the Arts and Crafts movement and a philosopher of homespun wisdom, who celebrated the American virtues of know-how and can-do a hundred years ago.

Last July, Wachovia told Anita Lux that her eighteen years at the bank were over. They were very nice about it: the vice-president who spoke to her was also being fired, and the two women cried together and talked about severance packages and health insurance. Anita had seen it coming, but she couldn't get over the feeling of rejection.

"I had always been active in the bank," she said. "I volunteered for Big Brothers Big Sisters, the American Cancer Society. I liked doing it, but I also felt it was doing good for the bank." Now Elbert Hubbard's exhortation kept coming back to her. "You see my point?" Anita asked, her eyes welling up. "I thought as long as I worked for a company and stood by a company and spoke well of a company, the company would stand by me. And it didn't. The sign was wrong, in my case."

Anita was fifty-eight when she got fired. A lot of the downsizing at Wachovia hit women her age, and she was afraid that no one would want to hire her. She'd had no luck yet, despite attending job fairs and having had two or three phone interviews. It was a shock to be on unemployment, and there were so many out-of-work professionals like her that the unemployment office had begun holding special classes for them. Richard's work as a self-employed architect had dried up in early 2008, and Anita's health insurance will run out in July. The one saving grace was that the Luxes had always been more frugal than Wachovia, which was bought by Wells Fargo on the last day of 2008 and will soon cease to exist.

Across the bay from the Luxes, in Tampa, Dan and Ronale Hartzell live in a cramped, featureless two-bedroom apartment on a strip of apartment complexes and motels near MacDill Air Force Base. Until last March, Dan had a ten-dollar-an-hour job laminating plastic snack-food bags, at a small plant in Tampa. He was laid off without explanation. Dan said that his supervisor, who had gone to high school with him, made someone else give him the news. He was still angry about that.

Dan had been looking for work ever since—Home Depot, Sam's Club, Publix, at least sixty applications—with no luck. "It's just been so hard out there, it's so saturated," he said. "When you apply, they tell you you're the twenty-fifth person to apply." He was a short, potbellied man in his thirties, with a wispy goatee and a shaved head under his Steelers cap. (He came from Pittsburgh.) He was missing some teeth and spoke in a loud voice, owing to deafness in one ear, and it was easy to imagine the wariness of prospective employers in the low-wage service sector, the only area where jobs seemed to be available. "I would classify myself as a blue-collar type guy," he said. "I'm not the behind-the-counter-take-your-money-can-I-help-you-find-your-dress-size type. That's not my kind of thing." But no one was advertising blue-collar jobs.

"He was an excellent worker," Ronale said. Like her husband, she had extensive tooth decay, and was beset with numerous other medical problems, for which there was no money. "He's always been that way. And he's a fast learner."

"All I've got is my work habits—what can I do?" Dan said. "I've got two children."

"He doesn't drink. He doesn't do drugs."

We were sitting in their living room around a cheap flat-screen TV showing the local news—they had bought it with last year's Earned Income Tax Credit. Brent, in fifth grade (and unusually small for his age), sat on the dingy carpet, holding the hand of Danielle, in second (with hearing loss). Their father was a high-school dropout, which he regretted intensely and blamed for his inability to find a job. But Dan also felt that the world was holding something against him: "You almost get to the point where, what's the point? You apply and apply, and nothing happens. I start to wonder, What's wrong with me? Why do all these people out there view me as such a bad person? They don't know me, they don't know my work history, they won't give me a chance. I'm blue-collar. You work for what you have, that's all anyone can do, and then all of a sudden the economy gets so bad and instead of thirty people looking for work there's three thousand," he said. "To be honest, I'm just actually starting to lose heart now."

Dan and Ronale were estranged from their families, and since most of the people they knew were heavy drinkers, they had few friends. Dan said, "As far as the support system, you're looking at it."

The Hartzells didn't take out a subprime mortgage. They hadn't lived beyond their means. After Dan lost his job, they stopped renting DVDs and buying toys. They hadn't even turned against each other. "I thank God every day that I have her," Dan said, and Ronale said, "One thing we don't argue about is money, because we don't have none." They felt lucky to have avoided eviction, but now they were facing the real possibility of homelessness. It would be hard to find more unambiguous victims of the housing bust and its thousand cascading effects.

Dan knew that his plight was the result of rising unemployment in a bad economy that was shedding the few remaining manufacturing jobs. In Hillsborough County, forty-eight thousand people had no work. And yet, in pondering the causes of his trouble, Dan couldn't avoid the feeling that the world had singled him out for some terrible payback, that it must have been his fault, that the failure was his alone and he had no right to anyone else's help. It occurred to me that this was an attitude that no senior figure on Wall Street had adopted.

After going a full year without making a mortgage payment, Jennifer and Ron Formosa realized that they were about to lose their house in Cape Coral. "When they were going to put that ugly yellow auction sticker on it, I didn't want to live there," Jennifer said. They found a place to rent nearby that was larger and less expensive, and in January they vacated their house and moved. Even in the new place, Jennifer dreaded the ringing telephone, with various creditors threatening to have her wages garnisheed. The Formosas wanted to file for bankruptcy, but they couldn't quite afford the fourteen-hundred-dollar fee, even though Ron had found a job working for a locksmith, at nine dollars an hour, plus commission. Most of the work involved changing the locks on foreclosures.

One evening in January, the Formosas sat at the kitchen table in their new house while the children did their homework. On a large-screen TV, Barack Obama was explaining the terms of the bailout. "I'm not saying what we did was perfect," Jennifer said. "We spent our money and didn't save it. But we had it, and we didn't see that this was going to happen." She thought for a moment. "This whole situation—I won't do things the way I did before."

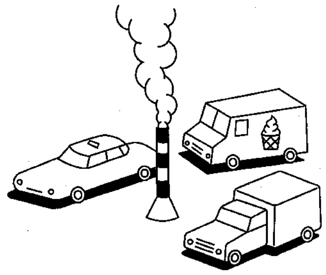
"Lessons learned," Ron said.

"I'll save my money instead of spend it," Jennifer said. "I don't think I'll ever want to buy a house again."

Richard and Anita Lux were using their new free time to read more and take long morning walks together. As they walked, they discussed books they were both reading—Herman Wouk's "War and Remembrance" was a recent one—which helped fortify the mind, Richard said, against all the depressing news. He said, "The good thing about this is people are talking to people, families are talking to families, and eventually people are going to get it that there's more to life than the greed-is-good arrogance of recent years, and back to the pleasures of life."

"Back to the value of the dollar, not the volume," Anita added. She had not yet found a new job.

In the office of Pam Iorio, who, at forty-nine, is Tampa's mayor, a map was spread across the table. It was titled "2035 M.P.O. Long Range Transportation Plan DRAFT"—a blueprint for Tampa's first light-rail system. Greater Tampa, with nearly three million people, is, after Detroit, the largest metropolitan area in the country without one. For nearly two decades, while planners carried out fourteen million dollars' worth of studies, local politicians refused to push the project, which would require voters in Hillsborough County to pass a referendum raising the sales tax by one cent.



Iorio is determined to have mass transit approved before her term ends, in 2011. "We are twenty years behind the rest of the country, in terms of light rail," she said. "It will put us at a huge economic disadvantage without it." In Iorio's view, the industries of the future won't come to an area without mass transit. The project interested me, because it cut directly against the way people around Tampa Bay lived. It would get them out of their cars, lure them back to the city, and develop the metropolitan area with taxes and services, rather than depend on endless growth.

"The reason we don't have it now is people have thought for years we don't need it," Iorio said. "Florida's already growing fine—why should we make those long-term investments? We need them precisely because of the crisis we're in. We'd have our own long-term economic-stimulus package right here, right now, if we had this in place." Instead, with the federal government poised to spend hundreds of billions of dollars on infrastructure, Tampa has no big "shovel-ready" transportation projects lined up, except for a widening of the connector between Interstates 4 and 275.

Iorio had been described to me as a competent, unimaginative public servant, but in our conversation she sounded almost visionary. "If there can be any good from this economic calamity that is occurring, it is causing us to reassess ourselves as a country, as a state, as a city," she said. "We have to reassess the institutions that we trusted and can't trust anymore. We have to reassess the role of government in the private sector. And, locally and as a state, we have to reassess the basis of our economy. A state that is so dependent on the ebb and flow of construction does not have a strong foundation for its economic future." Putting a light-rail system to the voters would be part of the reassessment. "It goes beyond the S.U.V. It goes to how we're going to live in this community. We can't continue to build four-thousand-square-foot houses miles outside cities."

A number of people in Florida told me that the state needs a fundamental change in its political culture. Ben Eason, the owner of *Creative Loafing*, said, "In the next ten years, growth will return to the cities from the suburbs," but he added that Tampa's leadership lacks a "forward-thinking core to propel the dynamic of the city." The Florida state government estimates that it will have an $8.5-billion shortfall in revenues by 2012, which Governor Charlie Crist and the legislature are trying to remedy by dipping into short-term reserve funds and by deeply cutting spending. (The Governor's office did not respond to requests for comment.) Libraries are closing, university budgets are being slashed, and social services are cutting back, even as demand soars. In Hillsborough County, civil circuit-court judges are carrying some three thousand cases at a time. "You can't say this too loud, because you get shot around here," David Reed, the investment-fund manager in Tampa, said. "But we need an income tax."

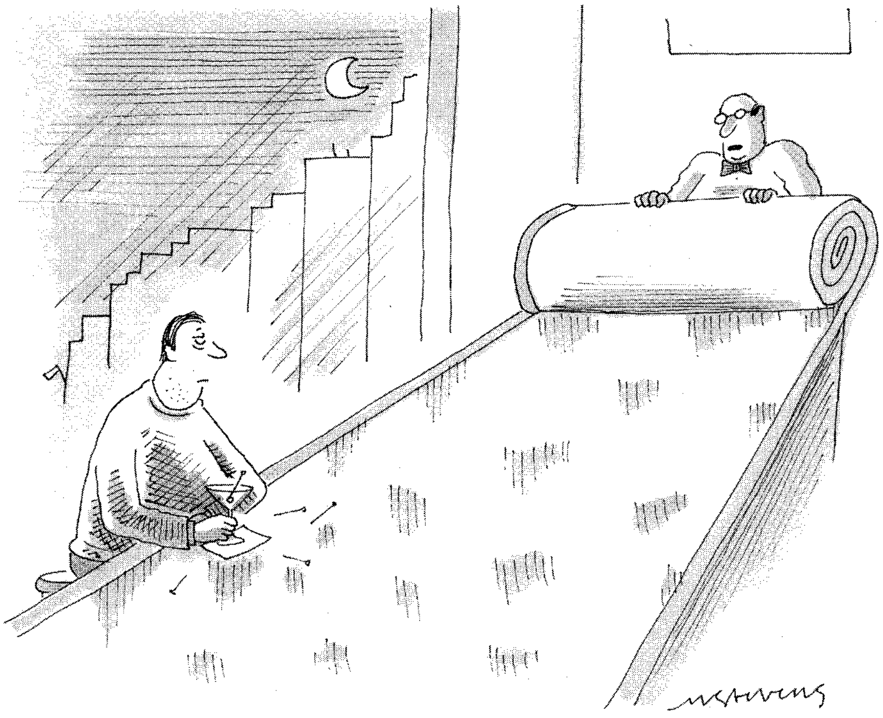
During the era of George and Jeb Bush, places like Pasco County and Cape Coral voted heavily Republican, and became the political center of gravity in Florida. But in 2008 a right-wing former professional wrestler lost his seat on the Hillsborough County Commission to a gay ex-cop who supports mass transit. And, to many people's surprise, Barack Obama won the county, helping him carry Florida. With his election, political power has begun shifting away from the sprawling suburbs and back to the cities. When, in his Inaugural Address, Obama called for "a new era of responsibility," he was speaking about Wall Street and Washington, but he was surely also speaking about Florida, which holds up to the rest of the country a funhouse mirror of distorting accuracy.

Driving around Florida's ghost subdivisions, you feel not just that their influence is waning but that they are physically hollowing out. In a place like Lehigh Acres, near Fort Myers, where half the driveways are sprouting weeds, and where garbage piles up in the bushes along the outer streets, it's already possible to see the slums of the future. More and more of the residents in Hamilton Park will be renters like Lee Gaither. The vacant houses in Country Walk will be boarded up. The St. Augustine grass in the front yards of Tanglewood Preserve will grow three feet high. The open fields with street lights but no houses will become dumps.

"It's Florida," Doug Bennett, the chief of the Riverview bureau of the St. Petersburg *Times*, in eastern Hillsborough County, said. "Most of the governors never saw a developer they didn't like." He was looking through the window of his second-floor office: outside, a vast open field was littered with construction equipment and trailers. Another development had stalled—the shopping mall and offices were built, but the "faux village" never materialized. "Stucco ghettos," Bennett said. "I live in one, so I can say that. Too many houses, not enough water, the economy's terrible, no tourists. This is the capital of the low-wage jobs, and when things go bad people just have no safety net. It's very unfortunate." He turned back to his desk. "This is the epicenter of everything that's bad in America."

The sense of urgency among a few people was less striking than the strange calm among everyone else. It was either grace under pressure or blind folly, but I encountered it everywhere: the serene conviction that visitors would start coming again, and everything would be the way it was before. "The sun's still shining—go down to the beach and it's packed," Marc Joseph, the real-estate agent in Fort Myers, said. "This is just a hiccup, and we'll get through it. It just happens to be a little longer than most hiccups, because it's not just here—it's globalized."

Joseph was already adapting his business to the new reality. He had started Fort Myers's first foreclosure bus tour—an efficient way for speculators to mop up cheap properties. And he was about to launch a foreclosure boat tour, on the canals of Cape Coral. It was, he told me more than once, a great time to buy. ♦



"Last call, Eddie."

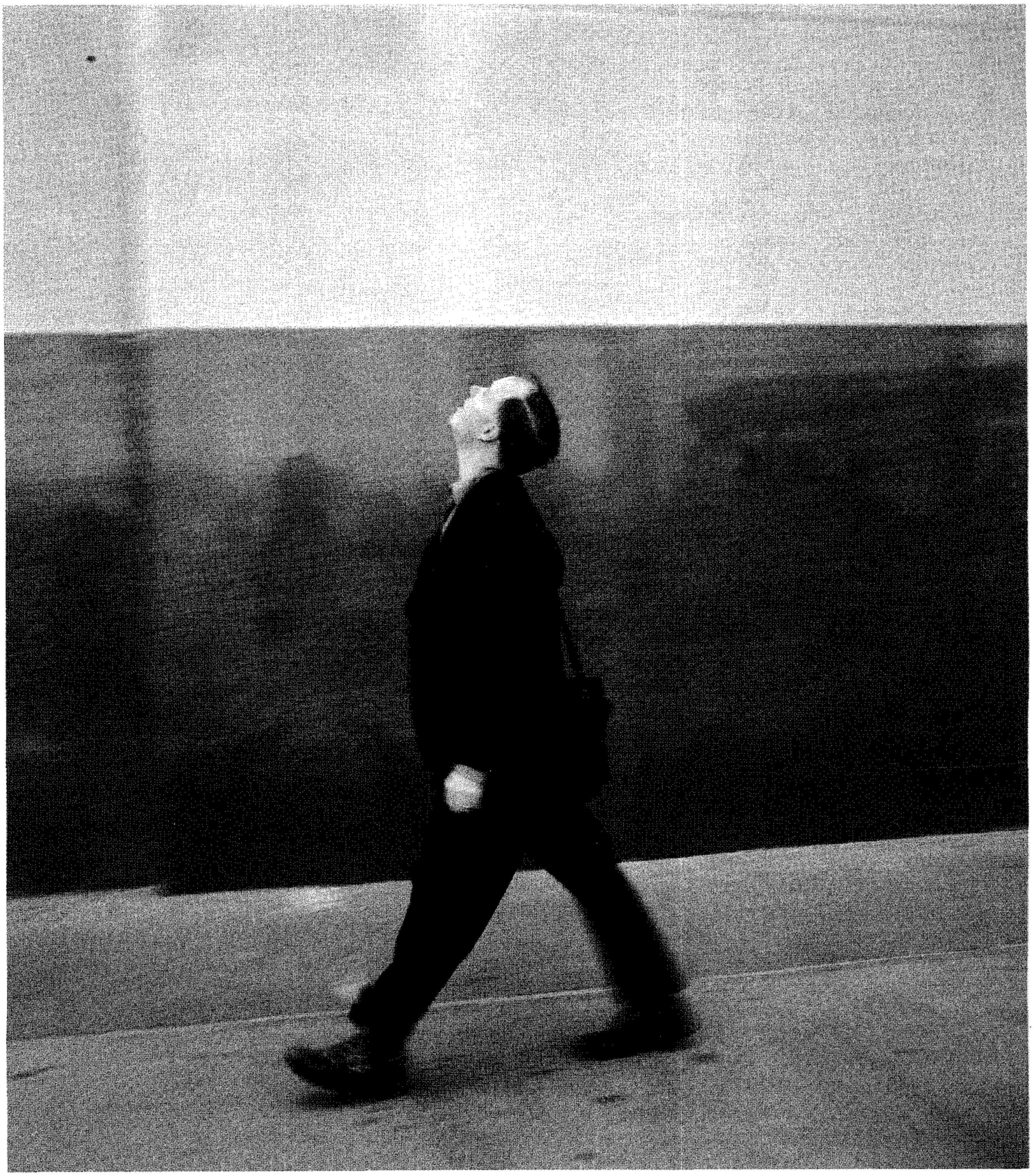
NEWYORKER.COM

Video: George Packer on Florida real estate.

FICTION

THE INVASION FROM OUTER SPACE

BY STEVEN MILLHAUSER



From the beginning we were prepared, we knew just what to do, for hadn't we seen it all a hundred times?—the good people of the town going about their business, the suddenly interrupted TV programs, the faces in the crowd looking up, the little girl pointing in the air, the mouths opening, the dog yapping, the traffic stopped, the shopping bag falling to the sidewalk, and there, in the sky, coming closer . . . And so, when it finally happened, because it was bound to happen, we all knew it was only a matter of time, we felt, in the midst of our curiosity and terror, a certain calm, the calm of familiarity, we knew what was expected of us, at such a moment. The story broke a little after ten in the morning. The TV anchors looked exactly the way we knew they'd look, their faces urgent, their hair neat, their shoulders tense, they were filling us with alarm but also assuring us that everything was under control, for they, too, had been prepared for this, in a sense had been waiting for it, already they were looking back at themselves during their great moment. The sighting was indisputable but, at the same time, inconclusive: something from out there had been detected, it appeared to be approaching our atmosphere at great speed, the Pentagon was monitoring the situation closely. We were urged to remain calm, to stay inside, to await further instructions. Some of us left work immediately and hurried home to our families, others stayed close to the TV, the radio, the computer, we were all talking into our cells. Through our windows we could see people at their windows, looking up at the sky. All that morning we followed the news fiercely, like children listening to a thunderstorm in the dark. Whatever was out there was still unknown, scientists had not yet been able to determine its nature, caution was advised but there was no reason for panic, our job was to stay tuned and sit tight and await further developments. And though we were anxious, though quivers of nervousness ran along our bodies like mice, we wanted to see whatever it was, we wanted to be there, since after all it was coming toward *us*, it was ours to witness, as if we were the ones they'd chosen, out there on the other side of the sky. For already it was being said that our town was the likely landing place, already the TV crews were rolling in. We wondered where it would land: between the duck pond and the seesaws in the public park, or deep in the woods at the north end of town, or maybe in the field out by the mall, where a new excavation was already under way, or maybe it would glide over the old department store on Main Street and crash through the second-floor apartments above Mangione's Pizza and Café, with a great shattering of brick and glass, maybe it would land on the throughway and we'd see eighteen-wheelers turn over, great chunks of pavement rise up at sharp angles, and car after car swerve into the guardrail and roll down the embankment.

OLIVIER CULMANN/TENDANCE FLOUE

Something appeared in the sky shortly before one o'clock. Many of us were still at lunch, others were already outside, standing motionless on the streets and sidewalks, gazing up. There were shouts and cries, arms in the air, a wildness of gesturing, pointing. And, sure enough, something was glittering, up there in the sky, something was shimmering, in the blue air of summer—we saw it clearly, whatever it was. Secretaries in offices rushed to windows, storekeepers abandoned their cash registers and hurried outdoors, road workers in orange hard hats looked up from the asphalt, shaded their eyes. It must have lasted—that faraway glow, that spot of shimmer—some three or four minutes. Then it began to grow larger, until it was the size of a dime, a quarter. Suddenly the entire sky seemed to be filled with points of gold. Then it was coming down on us, like fine pollen, like yellow dust. It lay on our roof slopes, it sifted down onto our sidewalks, covered our shirtsleeves and the tops of our cars. We did not know what to make of it.

It continued to come down, that yellow dust, for nearly thirteen minutes. During that time we could not see the sky. Then it was over. The sun shone, the sky was blue. Throughout the downpour, we'd been warned to stay inside, to be careful, to avoid touching the substance from outer space, but it had happened so quickly that most of us had streaks of yellow on our clothes and in our hair. Soon after the warnings, we heard cautious reassurances: preliminary tests revealed nothing toxic, though the nature of the yellow dust remained unknown. Animals that had eaten it revealed no symptoms. We were urged to keep out of its way and await further test results. Meanwhile it lay over our lawns and sidewalks and front steps, it coated our maple trees and telephone poles. We were reminded of waking in the morning after the first snow. From our porches we watched the three-wheeled sweepers move slowly along our streets, carrying it off in big hoppers. We hosed down our grass, our front walks, our porch furniture. We looked up at the sky, we waited for more news—already we were hearing reports that the substance was composed of one-celled organisms—and through it all we could sense the swell of our disappointment.

We had wanted, we had wanted—oh, who knew what we'd been looking for? We had wanted blood, crushed bones, howls of agony. We had wanted buildings crumbling onto streets, cars bursting into flame. We had wanted monstrous versions of ourselves with enlarged heads on stalklike necks, merciless polished robots armed with death rays. We had wanted noble lords of the universe with kind, soft eyes, who would usher in a glorious new era. We had wanted terror and ecstasy—anything but this yellow dust. Had it even been an invasion? Later that afternoon, we learned that scientists all agreed: the dust was a living thing. Samples had been flown to Boston, Chicago, Washington, D.C. The single-celled organisms appeared to be harmless, though we were cautioned not to touch anything, to keep the windows shut, to wash our hands. The cells reproduced by binary fission. They appeared to do nothing but multiply.

In the morning, we woke to a world covered in yellow dust. It lay on the tops of our fences, on the crossbars of telephone poles. Black tire tracks showed in the yellow streets. Birds, shaking their wings, threw up sprays of yellow powder. Again the street-sweepers came, the hoses splashed on driveways and lawns, making a yellow mist and revealing the black and the green underneath. Within an hour the driveways and lawns resembled yellow fields. Lines of yellow ran along cables and telephone wires.

According to the news, the unicellu-

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FROM
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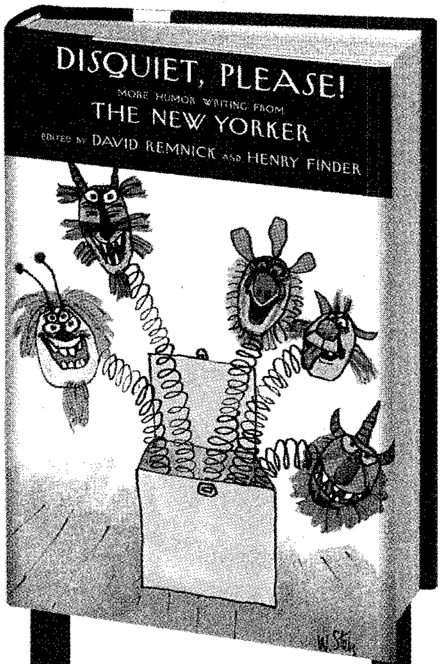
If laughter is the best medicine, Disquiet, Please! *is a wonder drug.*



An uproarious sampling of humor writing from *The New Yorker,* including fancies, rebukes, asides, and musings from

Woody Allen
Noah Baumbach
Adam Gopnik
Steve Martin
Patricia Marx
S. J. Perelman
David Sedaris
Calvin Trillin
AND MANY OTHERS

From the editors of *Fierce Pajamas,*

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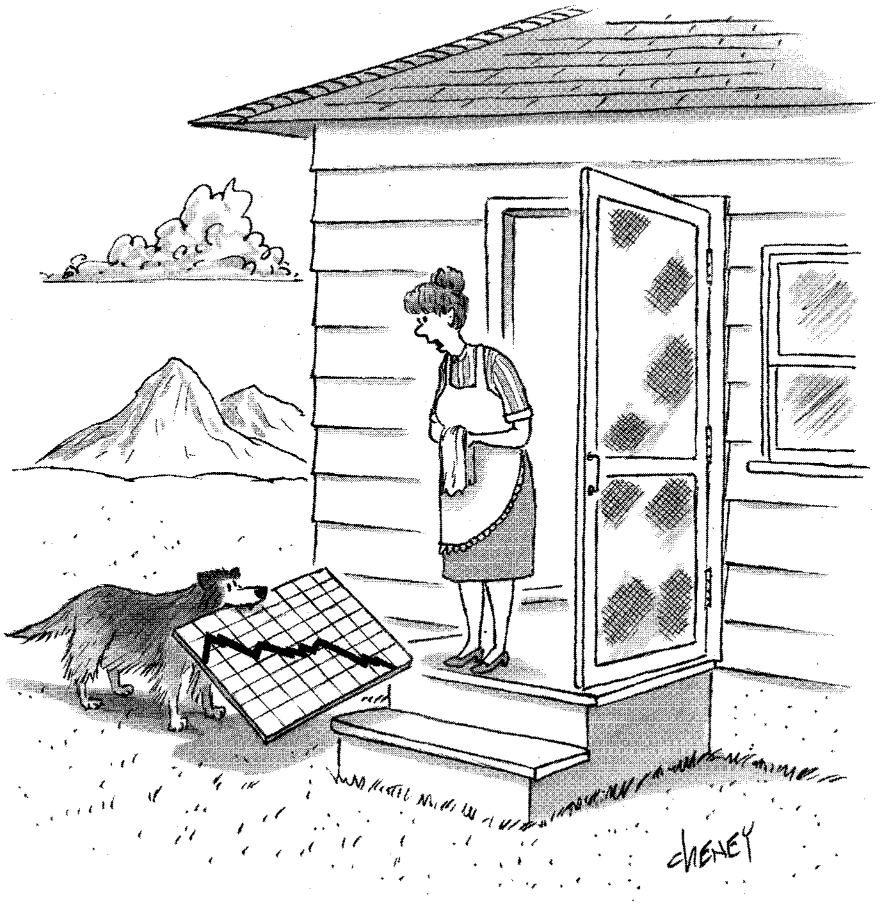
lar microorganisms are rod-shaped and nourish themselves by photosynthesis. A single cell, placed in a brightly illuminated test tube, divides at such a rate that the tube will fill in about forty minutes. An entire room, in strong light, will fill in six hours. The organisms do not fit easily into our classification schemes, though in some respects they resemble blue-green algae. There is no evidence that they are harmful to human or animal life.

We have been invaded by nothing, by emptiness, by animate dust. The invader appears to have no characteristic other than the ability to reproduce rapidly. It doesn't hate us. It doesn't seek our annihilation, our subjection and humiliation. Nor does it desire to protect us from danger, to save us, to teach us the secret of immortal life. What it wishes to do is replicate. It is possible that we will find a way of limiting the spread of this primitive intruder, or of eliminating it altogether; it's also possible that we will fail and that our town will gradually disappear under a fatal accumulation. As we follow the reports from day to day, the feeling grows in us that we deserved something else, something bolder, something grander, something more thrilling, something bristling or fiery or fierce, something that might have represented a revelation or a destiny. We imagine ourselves surrounding the tilted spaceship, waiting for the door to open. We imagine ourselves protecting our children, slashing the tentacles that thrust in through the smashed cellar windows. Instead, we sweep our front walks, hose off our porches, shake out our shoes and sneakers. The invader has entered our homes. Despite our drawn shades and closed curtains, it lies in thick layers on our end tables and windowsills. It lies along the tops of our flat-screen televisions and the narrow edges of our shelved DVDs. Through our windows we can see the yellow dust covering everything, forming gentle undulations. We can almost see it rising slowly, like bread. Here and there it catches the sunlight and reminds us, for a moment, of fields of wheat.

It is really quite peaceful, in its way. ♦



"What is it, Lassie—is Timmy in trouble?"

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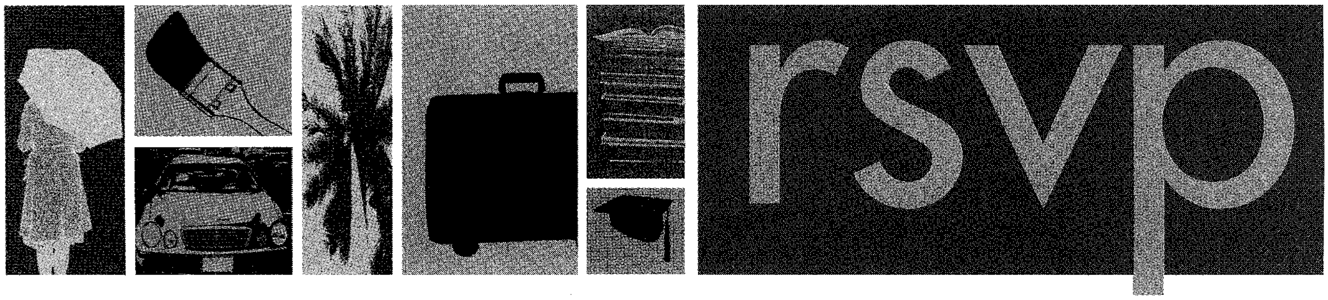

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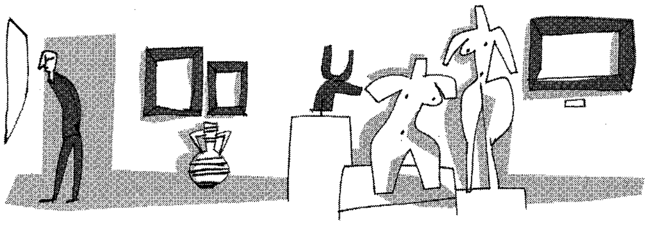


POP MUSIC

THE QUEEN

Beyoncé, at last.

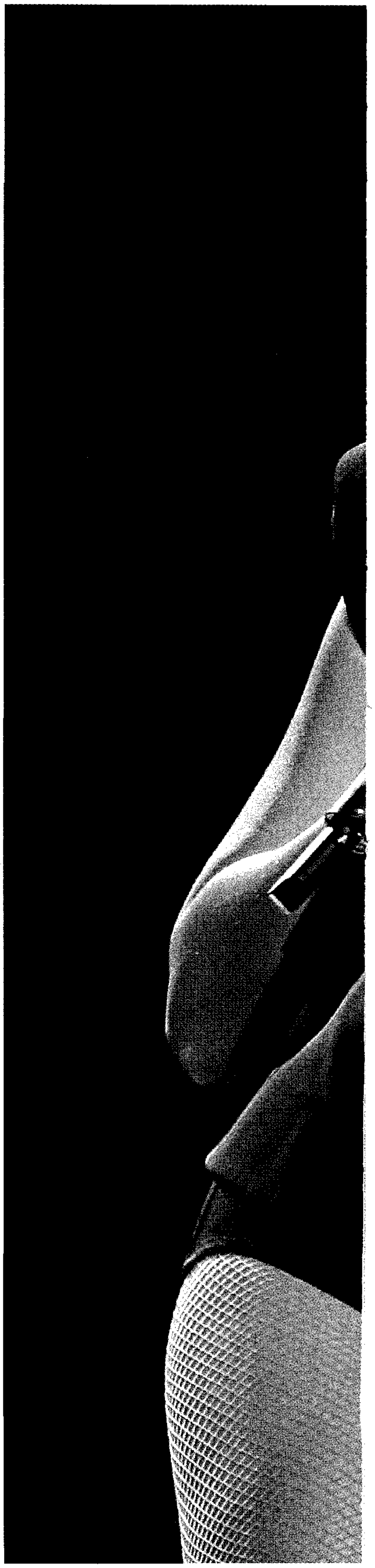
BY SASHA FRERE-JONES

Bruce Springsteen is the de-facto governor of New Jersey, and if America were Europe Aretha Franklin would have a duchy, so both obviously belonged at the joyous Obamathon. But what about Beyoncé Knowles, the twenty-seven-year-old who was chosen to sing for Obama at two inaugural events?

The world met Beyoncé in 1998 as the leader of Destiny's Child, a girl group conceived in part and managed by Matthew Knowles, her father. Destiny's Child was high-tech declarations of autonomy and flair: "No, No, No," "Bills, Bills, Bills," "Independent Women, Pt. 1," and "Survivor." To underestimate Knowles and her rotating cast of backup singers is to find yourself on the business end of a No. 1 song. (Destiny's Child is the most successful female R. & B. group in history.) Yet none of this involved Beyoncé cursing, committing infidelity, or breaking any laws, even in character. The Knowles empire is delicately balanced on one of the thinnest-known edges in pop feminism: as unbiddable as Beyoncé gets, she never risks arrant aggression; and as much of hip-hop's confidence and sound as she borrows, she never drifts to the back of the classroom. She is pop's A student, and it has done her a world of commercial good.

She is also a strange and brilliant musician. Young black female singers rarely get past the red rope and into the Genius Lounge—the moody, the male, and the dead crowd that room. But with or without co-writers, Knowles does remarkable things with tone and harmony. The one time I met her, backstage at a Destiny's Child concert in Peoria in 2000, she talked about listening to Miles Davis and Fela Kuti—affinities I didn't know how to process until I heard "Apple Pie à la Mode," from the following year's Destiny's Child album, "Survivor." It's a slinky song, something of a throwaway, except that Prince or D'Angelo could easily have done the throwing away. Who else in the stratosphere of R. & B. pop plays around with the conversational voice like Beyoncé? Who feels comfortable with adding so much unexpected, generous harmony to a trifle about a delicious crush? Anyone else with "Apple Pie à la Mode" in the bag would flip over backward, buy a retro-glam outfit, and construct an entire side project around it. Knowles simply kept moving.

Where she was heading, as she and her father must have always known, was toward a gigantic solo career. That meant that she would have to choose among unity of purpose (the way Céline Dion chose the power ballad as her sidearm of choice), full-on idiosyncrasy (as Björk did, after leaving the Sugarcubes for a life of dedicated unpredictability), or some compromise between the two that could retain old fans while convincing tourists that she was worth following. Executed successfully, this move is called the Sting (who never matched the songwriting quality of his



Too good for her alter ego? "I Am . . . Sash

ABOVE: LENE DUE-JENSEN; OPPOSITE: VINCE BUCCI/GETTY

Fierce," Beyoncé's middling new album-cum-persona, is redeemed by her channe old band the Police but has provided himself with a robust living and a large, loyal following). Done wrong, it's called—well, many names, all of which involve repeated pleas for the old band to regroup.

Beyoncé has yet to come to a decision, though her success as a solo artist seems to be entirely secure. (She has made three solo albums, all of them yielding No. 1 songs.) This is a testament to something deeply appealing about Beyoncé, because her first album, "Dangerously in Love" (2003), has three good songs, at best; her second, "B'Day" (2006), is completely enjoyable; and her new one, "I Am . . . Sasha Fierce" (featuring a supposedly new, wilder alter ego), is something of a mess. Apparently, Knowles felt that it was high time to offer a different definition of Beyoncéness. But why?

"I Am . . . Sasha Fierce" stretches an hour's worth of material over two compact disks, the first supposedly by our old friend Beyoncé, the second by Ms. Fierce. The album began arriving on the Internet in November with "Single Ladies (Put a Ring on It)," whose video has eclipsed the song itself. (The choreography for Beyoncé and her two dancers is borrowed from some old Bob Fosse routines and has inspired dozens of imitations, including one by an almost-naked man dancing in the Alaskan snow and one with Justin Timberlake, doing his best drag routine for "Saturday Night Live.") The song, produced by The-Dream and Tricky Stewart, is reminiscent of the best moments on "B'Day." The rhythms are provided in part by handclaps, and the chanting vocal line is underscored by a swell of weird, dark synthesizers that don't seem to know about the party going on in the rest of the song. But, then, the whole thing is a bit off. The singer is out on the town, engaging her single lady friends and enjoying the attention of a new man. Why is she out on the town? Because her man didn't "put a ring on it." But this is Sasha Fierce we're talking about here. And what does Sasha want? Matrimony! When does she want it? Before "three good years" are up. "Single Ladies" is an infectious, crackling song and would be without fault if it weren't the bearer of such dull advice.

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The wild R. & B. vampire Sasha is advocating marriage? What's next, a sultry, R-rated defense of low-sodium soy sauce?

"I Am . . . Sasha Fierce" trips on this idea of redefinition, largely because Beyoncé has been relatively fierce since she started. The first disk's initial single, "If I Were a Boy," is a slow, almost rocklike ballad that ponders the gender differential. Boys get to wear what they want, chase girls, and enjoy normative privilege. Y'know—the patriarchy. But Destiny's Child handled all this on "Independent Women, Pt. 1," and with a lot more verve.

For all that, liking Beyoncé is still a wise bet. What Knowles fails to convey with Sasha Fierce she accomplishes in the movie "Cadillac Records," with her portrayal of someone who headlines in the Genius Lounge—Etta James. When Beyoncé rolls her body and her voice into James's music, the results are not safe. Her version of James is a worthy tribute to the sexuality and craft of the woman we know from her Chess recordings. Why Knowles could not make her own record as spontaneous and magnetic probably has something to do with the Knowles vision of Beyoncé's fans and how much actual fierceness they can take.

When Beyoncé sang for the Obamas at the Neighborhood Ball on January 20th, the whole shebang revealed itself in a synergistic flash. The song of choice was Etta James's "At Last." Team Knowles was not going to waste one of the year's biggest broadcast events. As the exuberant First Couple slow-danced, Knowles did her part to turn basic romantic folderol into historic prophecy: our lonely nights are gone, the skies are blue, we've all found a dream. One slightly artless twirl-about was all that the crowd needed to cheer the President on. Knowles gave the song the right blend of smoothness and grit, watching the couple, and holding back what looked like bona-fide tears. It was pitch-perfect and seemed genuine. And maybe this is why Beyoncé's audience isn't much bothered by her need to futz about with unconvincing role-playing. She's really good at being good. ♦

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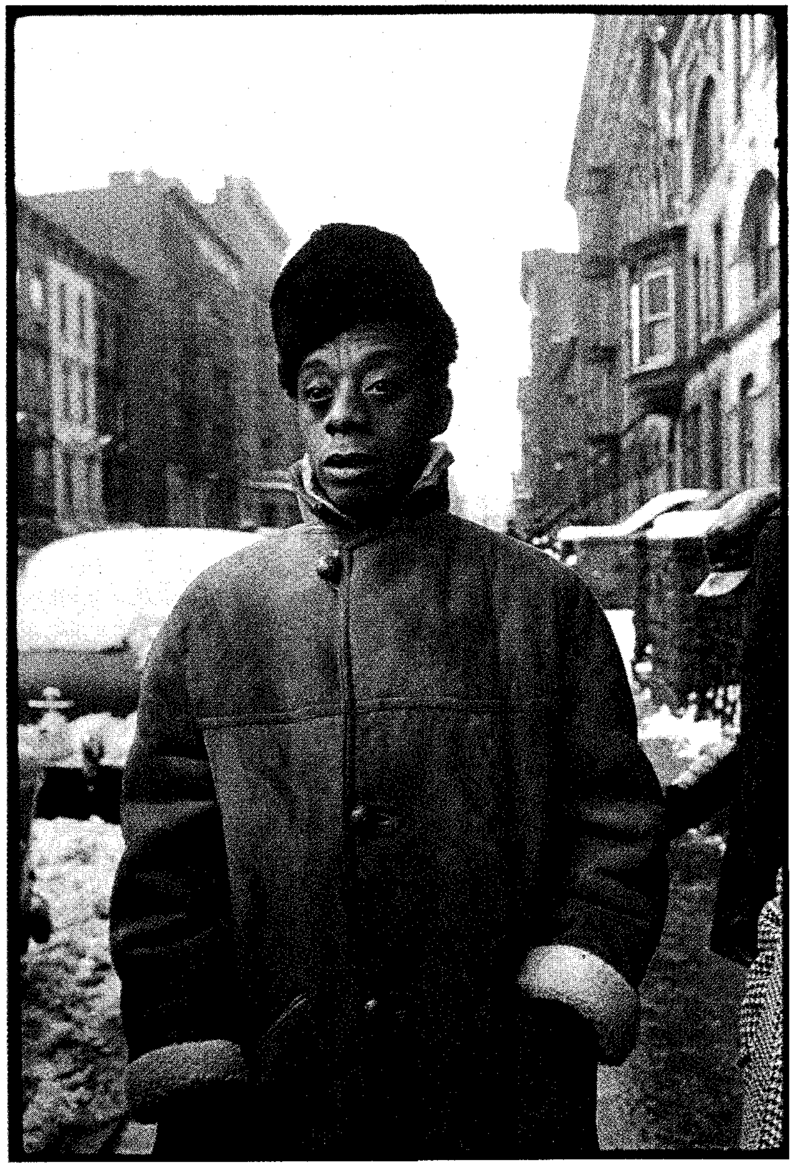
Sasha Frere-Jones's pop-music blog.

6

ANOTHER COUNTRY

James Baldwin's flight from America.

BY CLAUDIA ROTH PIERPONT



Baldwin in Harlem, in 1963. Photograph by Steve Schapiro.

Feeling more than usually restless, James Baldwin flew from New York to Paris in the late summer of 1961, and from there to Israel. Then, rather than proceed as he had planned to Africa—a part of the world he was not ready to confront—he decided to visit a friend in Istanbul. Baldwin's arrival at his Turkish friend's door, in the midst of a party, was, as the friend recalled, a great surprise: two rings of the bell, and there stood a small and bedraggled black man with a battered suitcase and enormous eyes. Engin Cezzar was a Turkish actor who had worked with Baldwin in New York, and he excitedly introduced "Jimmy Baldwin, of literary fame, the famous black American novelist" to the roomful of intellectuals and artists. Baldwin, in his element, eventually fell asleep in an actress's lap.

It soon became clear that Baldwin was in terrible shape: exhausted, in poor health, worried that he was losing sight of his aims both as a writer and as a man. He desperately needed to be taken care of, Cezzar said; or, in the more dramatic terms that Baldwin used throughout his life, to be saved. His suitcase contained the manuscript of a long and ambitious novel that he had been working on for years, and that had already brought him to the brink of suicide. Of the many things that the wandering writer hoped to find—friends, rest, peace of mind—his single overwhelming need, his only real hope of salvation, was to finish the book.

Baldwin had been fleeing from place to place for much of his adult life. He was barely out of his teens when he left his Harlem home for Greenwich Village, in the early forties, and he had escaped altogether at twenty-four, in 1948, buying a one-way ticket to Paris, with no intention of coming back. His father was dead by then, and his mother had eight younger children whom it tortured him to be deserting; he didn't have the courage to tell her he was going until the afternoon he left. There was, of course, no shortage of reasons for a young black man to leave the country in 1948. Devastation was all around: his contemporaries, out on Lenox Avenue, were steadily going to jail or else were on "the needle." His father, a factory worker and a preacher—"he was righteous in the pulpit," Baldwin said, "and a monster in the house"—had died insane, poisoned with racial bitterness. Baldwin had also sought refuge in the church, becoming a boy preacher when he was fourteen, but had soon realized that he was hiding from everything he wanted and feared he could never achieve. He began his first novel, about himself and his father, around the time he left the church, at seventeen. Within a few years, he was publishing regularly in magazines; book reviews, mostly, but finally an essay and even a short story. Still, who really believed that he could make it as a writer? In America?

The answer to both questions came from Richard Wright. Although Baldwin seemed a natural heir to the Harlem Renaissance—he was born right there, in 1924, and Countee Cullen was one of his schoolteachers—the bittersweet poetry of writers like Cullen and Langston

Hughes held no appeal for him. It was Wright's unabating fury that hit him hard. Reading "Native Son," Wright's novel about a Negro rapist and murderer, Baldwin was stunned to recognize the world that he saw around him. He knew those far from bittersweet tenements, he knew the rats inside the walls. Equally striking for a young writer, it would seem, was Wright's success: "Native Son," published in 1940, had been greeted as a revelation about the cruelties of a racist culture and its vicious human costs. In the swell of national self-congratulation over the fact that such a book could be published, it became a big best-seller. Wright was the most successful black author in history when Baldwin—twenty years old, hungry and scared—got himself invited to Wright's Brooklyn home, where, over a generously proffered bottle of bourbon, he explained the novel that he was trying to write. Wright, sixteen years Baldwin's senior, was more than sympathetic; he read Baldwin's pages, found him a publisher, and got him a fellowship to give him time to write. Although the publisher ultimately turned the book down, Wright gave Baldwin the confidence to continue, and the wisdom to do it somewhere else.

Wright moved to Paris in 1947 and, the following year, greeted Baldwin at the café Les Deux Magots on the day that he arrived, introducing him to editors of a new publication, called *Zero*, who were eager for his contributions. Baldwin had forty dollars, spoke no French, and knew hardly anyone else. Wright helped him find a room, and while it is true that the two writers were not close friends—Baldwin later noted the difference in their ages, and the fact that he had never even visited the brutal American South where Wright was formed—one can appreciate Wright's shock when Baldwin's first article for *Zero* was an attack on "the protest novel," and, in particular, on "Native Son." The central problem with the book, as Baldwin saw it, was that Wright's criminal hero was "defined by his hatred and his fear," and represented not a man but a social category; as a literary figure, he was no better than Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom. And he was more dangerous, perpetuating the "monstrous legend" of the black killer which Wright had meant to destroy. Wright blew up at Baldwin when they ran into each other at the Brasserie Lipp, but Baldwin did not back down. His article, reprinted later that year in *Partisan Review*, marked the start of his reputation in New York. He went on to publish even harsher attacks—arguing that Wright's work was gratuitously violent, that it ignored the traditions of Negro life, that Wright had become a spokesman rather than an artist—as he struggled to formulate everything that he wanted his own work to be.

Baldwin knew very well the hatred and fear that Wright described. Crucial to his development, he said, was the notion that he was a "bastard of the West," without any natural claim to "Shakespeare, Bach, Rembrandt, to the stones of Paris, to the cathedral at Chartres": to all the things that, as a budding artist and a Western citizen, he treasured most. As a result, he was forced to admit, "I hated and feared white people," which did not mean that he loved blacks: "On the contrary, I despised them, possibly because they failed to produce Rembrandt." He had been encouraged by white teachers, though, and was surrounded by white high-school friends, so that this cultural hatred seemed to remain a fairly abstract notion, and he had assumed that he would never feel his father's rage. Then one day, not long out of school, he was turned away from a New Jersey diner and, in a kind of trance, deliberately entered a glittering, obviously whites-only restaurant, and sat down. This time, when the waitress refused to serve him, he pretended not to hear in order to draw her closer—"I wanted her to come close enough for me to get her neck between my hands"—and finally hurled a mug of water at her and ran, realizing only when he had come to himself that he had been ready to murder another human being. In some ways, "Native Son" may have hit too hard.

The terrifying experience in the restaurant—terrifying not because of the evil done to him but because of the evil he suddenly felt able to do—helped to give Baldwin his first real understanding of his father, who had grown up in the South, the son of a slave, and who had, like Wright, been witness to unnameable horrors before escaping to the mundane humiliations of the North. Baldwin knew by then that the man whom he called his father was actually his stepfather, having married his mother when James was two years old; but, if this seemed to explain the extra measure of harshness that had been meted out to him, the greater tragedy of the man's embittered life and death remained. On the day of his funeral, in 1943, Baldwin recognized the need to fight this dreadful legacy, if he, too, were not to be consumed. More than a decade before the earliest stirrings of the civil-rights movement, the only way to conceive this fight was from within. "It now had been laid to my charge," he wrote, "to keep my own heart free of hatred and despair."

It takes a fire-breathing religion to blunt the hatred and despair in "Go Tell It on the Mountain" (1953), the autobiographical coming-of-age novel that Baldwin wrote and rewrote for a decade, centering on the battle for the soul of young John Grimes, on the occasion of his fourteenth birthday, in a shouting and swaying Harlem storefront church. For the boy, being saved is a way of winning the love of his preacher father—an impossible task. Still, part of the nobility of this remarkable book derives from Baldwin's reluctance to stain religious faith with too much psychological knowingness. More of the nobility lies in its language, which is touched with the grandeur of the sermons that Baldwin had heard so often in his youth. Then, too, after arriving in Paris, he had become immersed in the works of Henry James and, reading Joyce's "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man," had strongly identified with its self-creating hero. "He would not be like his father or his father's fathers," John Grimes swears. "He would have another life." Baldwin, led by these supreme authorial guides, to whom he felt a perfectly natural claim, set out to turn his shabby Harlem streets and churches into world-class literature. The book's moral and linguistic victories are seamless. Although Baldwin's people speak a simple and irregular "black" grammar, their loosely uttered "ain't"s and "I reckon"s flow without strain into prose of Jamesian complexity, of Biblical richness, as he penetrates their minds.

Baldwin wrote about the strictures of Harlem piety while living the bohemian life in Paris, hanging out in cafés and jazz clubs and gay bars; after having affairs with both men and women in New York, he had slowly come to accept that his desires were exclusively for men. His often frantic social schedule was one reason that the writing of "Go Tell It on the Mountain" dragged on and on. It also began to seem as though he somehow used places up and had to move to others, at least temporarily, in order to write. In the winter of 1951, he had packed the unruly manuscript and gone to stay with his current lover in a small Swiss village, where he completed it in three months, listening to Bessie Smith records to get the native sounds back in his ears. Published two years later, the book was a critical success; Baldwin claimed to have missed out on the National Book Award only because Ralph Ellison had won for "Invisible Man" the year before, and two Negroes in a row was just too much.

But it was Wright whom he still took for the monster he had to slay—or, perhaps, as he sometimes worried, for his father—and the book of essays that Baldwin published in 1955, which included two that were vehemently anti-Wright, was titled, in direct challenge, "Notes of a Native Son." It was not, by intent, a political book. In its first few pages, Baldwin explained that race was something he had to address in order to be free to write about other subjects: the writer's only real task was "to recreate out of the disorder of life that order which is art." The best of these essays are indeed closely personal, but invariably open to a political awareness that endows them with both order and weight. Baldwin's greatest strength, in fact, is the way the personal and the political intertwine, so that it becomes impossible to distinguish between these aspects of a life. The story of his father's funeral is also the story of a riot that broke out in Harlem that day, in the summer of 1943, when a white policeman shot a black soldier and set off a rampage in which white businesses were looted and smashed. "For Harlem had needed something to smash," Baldwin writes. If it had not been so late in the evening and the stores had not been closed, he warned, a lot more blood might have been shed.

In 1955, the injustice of the black experience was no longer news, and if Baldwin's warning drew attention it was overshadowed by the gentler yet more startling statements that made his work unique. In this newly politicized context, there was a larger lesson to be drawn from the hard-won wisdom, offered from his father's grave, that hatred "never failed to destroy the man who hated and this was an immutable law." Addressing a predominantly white audience—many of these essays were originally published in white liberal magazines—he sounds a tone very much like sympathy. Living abroad, he explained, had made him realize how irrevocably he was an American; he confessed that he felt a closer kinship with the white Americans he saw in Paris than with the African blacks, whose culture and experiences he had never shared. The races' mutual obsession, in America, and their long if hidden history of physical commingling had finally made them something like a family. For these reasons, Baldwin revoked the threat of violence with an astonishingly broad reassurance: American Negroes, he claimed, have no desire for vengeance. The relationship of blacks and whites is, after all, "a *blood* relationship, perhaps the most profound reality of the American experience," and cannot be understood until we recognize how much it contains of "the force and anguish and terror of love."

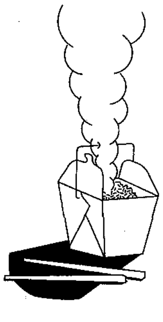
THE TWO YVONNES

For help he said I should read the new translation of a Gogol story called
"The Two Yvonnes," but after I wrote down the title
of course I realized he meant "Ivans" which brought me to the two
Two Yvonnes, one male, one female, whatever her story might be,
now that both of her exist in ballpoint on a line of notebook paper.
And because, at my age, facts tend to switch out with mere notions
like star actors being swapped out for lesser-paid stand-ins
the same day I got the time wrong for a friend's book party—
and what could be more spazzy than arriving early for a book party?
Not being an important actor I stayed on the scene and talked
to my friend's husband: Paul, I said, I love your painting, "Ezekiel's
Dream," which I saw on that postcard you sent out—how big is it?
He air-sketched a rectangle, tall as an old school window,
and I said, Oh, I thought it was more wide than tall,
at least from the postcard. Oh no, he said, it's more tall than wide. I
didn't believe him but I wasn't going to argue. How's *your* painting going?
he kindly asked. I don't paint, I said, barely wanting to admit it
since it's so rare to be asked about work. You're too modest!
he said. We had only met a few times so I explained, No, really, Paul,
I only write. Go on! he said, imitating me, *I only write*. Ha ha!
and this sort of exchange continued for some volleys, Paul's guffaws
escalating with each of my more earnest denials. Karen, I said,
finding my friend who was needed across the room because some heavy
guests had started arriving, Paul is mistaking me for another friend of yours
and he thinks I'm a really good painter! This is *Jess*, Karen said
into Paul's good ear, a thought that went directly to the voting booth
and pressed the lever. He nodded, remembering, and then Karen said to me,
Your hair! It's so much darker! Darker? I asked . . . Hmmm, I stalled,
trying not to embarrass anyone. Yes! she said, happy to be her honest self,
much, much darker! You used to have much lighter hair! Who
was she, I wondered, this sandy-haired painter who doubled for me
in their imaginations—the second Yvonne in the new translation—
and who are you? You who I thought the star of my story?

—Jessica Greenbaum

When Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a white man on a Montgomery bus, in December, 1955, Baldwin was absorbed with the publication of his second novel, "Giovanni's Room"; he watched from Paris as the civil-rights movement got under way, that spring. His new book had a Paris setting, no black characters, and not a word about race. Even more boldly, it was about homosexual love—or, rather, about the inability of a privileged young American man to come to terms with his sexuality and ultimately to feel any love at all. Brief and intense, the novel is brilliant in its exploration of emotional cowardice but marred by a portentous tone that at times feels cheaply secondhand—more "Bonjour Tristesse" than Gide or Genet. Although Baldwin had been cautioned about the prospects of a book with such a controversial subject, it received good reviews and went into a second printing in six weeks. As a writer, he had won the freedom he desired, and the decision to live abroad seemed fully vindicated. By late 1956, however, the atmosphere in Paris was changing. The Algerian war had made it difficult to ignore France's own racial problems, and newspaper headlines in the kiosks outside the cafés made it even harder to forget the troubles back home. And so the following summer Baldwin embarked on his most adventurous trip, to the land that some in Harlem still called the Old Country: the American South.

He was genuinely afraid. Looking down from the plane as it circled the red earth of Georgia, he could not help thinking that it "had acquired its color from the blood that had dripped down from these trees." It was September, 1957, and he was arriving just as the small number of black children who were entering all-white schools were being harassed by jeering mobs, spat upon, and threatened with much worse. In Charlotte, North Carolina, he interviewed one of these children—a proudly stoic straight-A student—and his mother. ("I wonder sometimes," she says, "what makes white folks so mean.") He also spoke with the principal of the boy's new school, a white man who had dutifully escorted the boy past a blockade of students but announced that he did not believe in racial integration, because it was "contrary to everything he had ever seen or believed." Baldwin, who is elsewhere stingingly eloquent about the effects of segregation, confronts this individual with the scope of his sympathies intact. Seeing him as the victim of a sorry heritage, he does not argue but instead commiserates, with a kind of higher moral cunning, about the difficulty of having to mistreat an innocent child. And at these words, Baldwin reports, "a veil fell, and I found myself staring at a man in anguish."



This evidence of dawning white conscience, as it appeared to Baldwin, accorded with the optimistic faith that he found in Atlanta, where he met the twenty-eight-year-old Martin Luther King, Jr., and heard him preach. Baldwin was struck by King's description of bigotry as a disease most harmful to the bigots, and by his solution that, in Baldwin's words, "these people could only be saved by love." This idealistic notion, shared by the two preachers' sons, was a basic tenet, and a basic strength, of the early civil-rights movement. Baldwin went on to visit Birmingham ("a doomed city"), Little Rock, Tuskegee, Montgomery, and Nashville; in 1960, he covered the sit-in movement in Tallahassee. His second volume of essays, "Nobody Knows My Name," published in 1961, was welcomed by white readers as something of a guidebook to the uncharted racial landscape. Although Baldwin laid the so-called "Negro problem" squarely at white America's door, viewing racism as a species of pathology, he nevertheless offered the consoling possibility of redemption through mutual love—no other writer would have described the historic relation of the races in America as "a wedding." And he avowed an enduring belief in "the vitality of the so transgressed Western ideals." The book was on the best-seller list for six months, and Baldwin was suddenly, as much as Richard Wright had ever been, a spokesman for his race.

The role was a great temptation and a greater danger. Given his ambitions, this was not the sort of success that he most wanted, and the previous few years had been plagued with disappointment

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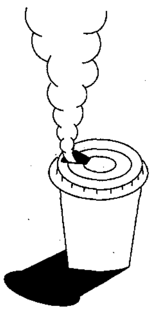
at failing to achieve the successes he craved. A play he had adapted from "Giovanni's Room," for the Actors Studio, in New York, had yielded nothing except a friendship with the young Turkish actor, Engin Cezzar, whom Baldwin had chosen to play Giovanni; the play, which Baldwin hoped would go to Broadway, never made it past the workshop level. His new novel, "Another Country," was hopelessly stalled; the characters, he said, refused to talk to him, and the "unpublishable" manuscript was ruining his life. He was drinking too much, getting hardly any sleep, and his love affairs had all gone sour. He wrote about having reached "the point at which many artists lose their minds, or commit suicide, or throw themselves into good works, or try to enter politics." To fend off all these possibilities, it seems, he accepted a magazine assignment to travel to Israel and Africa, then, out of weariness and fear, took up Cezzar's long-standing invitation, and found himself at the party in Istanbul. It was a wise move. In this distant city, no one wanted to interview him, no one was pressing him for social prophecy. He knew few people. He couldn't speak the language. There was time to work. He stayed for two months, and he was at another party—Baldwin would always find another party—calmly writing at a kitchen counter covered with glasses and papers and hors d'oeuvres, when he put down the final words of "Another Country." The book was dated, with a flourish, "Istanbul, Dec. 10, 1961."



It is an incongruous image, the black American writer in Istanbul, but Baldwin returned to the city many times during the next ten years, making it a second or third not-quite-home. In "James Baldwin's Turkish Decade" (Duke; $24.95), Magdalena J. Zaborowska, a professor of immigrant and African-American literature, sets out to explain not only the enduring attraction the city had for Baldwin but its importance for the rest of his career. For Zaborowska, "Istanbul, Dec. 10, 1961" is not merely a literary sigh of relief and wonderment—Baldwin's earlier books have no such endnote—but an affirmation of "the centrality of the city and date to the final shape of 'Another Country' "; she insists on Istanbul as "a location and lens through which we should reassess his work today." Divided between Europe and Asia, with a Muslim yet highly cosmopolitan population, Istanbul was unlike any place Baldwin had been before and, more to the point, unlike the places that had defined both the color of his skin and his sexuality as shameful problems. Whatever Turkey's history of prejudice, divisions there did not have an automatic black/white racial cast. And, on the sexual front, Istanbul had long been so notorious that Zaborowska is on the defensive against Americans who snidely assume that Baldwin went there for the baths. In fact, during his first days in the city, he was nearly giddy at the sight of men in the street openly holding hands, and could not accept Cezzar's explanation that this was a custom without sexual import. At the heart of the matter is the question of racial and sexual freedom—the city's, the writer's—and its effect on Baldwin's ability to reflect and to experiment in ways that he had not been able to do elsewhere.

But was this freedom real? How much of it can be found in Baldwin's work? Despite a tendency toward jargon—Academia is another country—Zaborowska is a charming companion as she follows Baldwin's steps through Turkey, brimming with enthusiasm at the sights and at the warmth of her reception by his friends. The Polish-born professor, a blithe exemplar of the "transnational" tradition in which she places Baldwin, is too idealistic and far too honest—the tender air of Henry James's Maisie hangs about her—to refrain from reporting her shock at some of those friends' remarks. "Jimmy was not a typical 'gay,' " one explains, "he was a real human being." In the matter of race, she informs us that she is omitting "Cezzar's use of the n-word, which he employed a couple of times but then abandoned, perhaps seeing my discomfort." As she admits, her own evidence refutes the hypothesis that Baldwin's Istanbul was untainted by the usual prejudice. And then there is the problem that Baldwin never wrote anything about Istanbul. Zaborowska labors to soften this hard fact through elaborate inferences and suggestions of symbolism, and by calling on various authorities for disquisitions on "the experience of place," or "Cold War Orientalism." (This is where the jargon really thickens.) But if she ultimately fails to make the case that Istanbul was anything for Baldwin but what he claimed—a refuge in which to write—she makes us feel how necessary such a refuge was as the sixties wore on.

"Another Country" turned out to be a best-seller in the most conventional sense. A sprawling book that brought together Baldwin's concerns with race and sex, its daring themes—black rage, interracial sex, homosexuality, white guilt, urban malaise—make an imposing backdrop for characters who refuse to come to life. A black jazz musician who plummets into madness because of an affair with a white woman; a white bisexual saint who cures both men and women in his bed—the social agenda shines through these figures like light through glass. More than anything else, the book reveals Baldwin's immense will and professionalism; like the contemporary best-sellers "Ship of Fools" and "The Group," it suggests a delicate and fine-tuned talent pushed past its narrative limits in pursuit of the "big" work. Baldwin claimed to be going after the sound of jazz musicians in his prose, but aside from some lingo on the order of "Some cat turned her on, and then he split," the language is stale compared with his earlier works—or compared with the burnished eloquence of his next book, which shook the American rafters when it was published, in early 1963.

"The Fire Next Time," Baldwin's most celebrated work, is a pair of essays, totalling little more than a hundred pages. Some of these pages were written in Istanbul, but more significant is the fact that Baldwin had finally gone to Africa. And, after years of worry that the Africans would look down on him, or, worse, that he would look down on them, he had been accepted and impressed. The book also reveals a renewed closeness with his family, whose support now counterbalanced both his public performances and his private loneliness. Eagerly making up for his desertion, Baldwin was a munificent son and brother and a doting uncle, glorying in the role of paterfamilias: his brother David was his closest friend and aide; his sister Gloria managed his money; he bought a large house in Manhattan, well outside Harlem, for his mother and the rest of the clan to share. To hear him tell it, this is what he had intended ever since he'd left. A new and protective pride is evident in the brief introductory "Letter to My Nephew," in which he assures the boy, his brother Wilmer's son James, that he descends from "some of the greatest poets since Homer," and quotes the words of a Negro spiritual; and in the longer essay, "Down at the Cross," when he portrays the black children who had faced down mobs as "the only genuine aristocrats this country has produced." Although Baldwin writes once again of his childhood, his father, and his church, his central subject is the Black Muslim movement then terrifying white America.

With the fire of the title blazing ever nearer, Baldwin praised the truthfulness of Malcolm X but rejected the separatism and violence of the Muslim movement. He offered pity rather than hatred—pity in order to avoid hatred—to the racists who, he firmly believed, despised in blacks the very things they feared in themselves. And, seeking dignity as much as freedom, he counselled black people to desist from doing to others as had been done to them. Most important, Baldwin once again promised a way out: "If we—and now I mean the relatively conscious whites and the relatively conscious blacks, who must, like lovers, insist on, or create, the consciousness of the others—do not falter in our duty now, we may be able, handful that we are, to end the racial nightmare, and achieve our country, and change the history of the world."

When did he stop believing it? No matter how many months he hid away in Istanbul or Paris, the sixties were inescapably Baldwin's American decade. In the spring of 1963, thanks to his most recent and entirely unconventional best-seller, he appeared on the cover of *Time*. Although he insisted that he was a writer and not a public spokesman, he had nonetheless undertaken a lecture tour of the South for CORE and soon held a meeting with Attorney General Robert Kennedy; in August, he took part in the March on Washington. It was with the bombing of a Birmingham church barely two weeks later, and the death of four schoolgirls, that he began to voice doubt about the efficacy of nonviolence. The murder of his friend Medgar Evers, and the dangers and humiliations involved in working on a voter-registration drive in Selma, brought a new toughness to his writing: a new willingness to deal in white stereotypes, and a new regard for hate. ("You're going to make yourself sick with hatred," someone warns a young man in Baldwin's 1964 play, "Blues for Mister Charlie." "No, I'm *not*," he replies, "I'm going to make myself well.") It is ironic that Baldwin was dismissed by the new radical activists and attacked by Eldridge Cleaver as this change was taking place: in an essay titled "Notes on a Native Son," in 1966, Cleaver did to Baldwin something like what Baldwin had done to Richard Wright, attacking him as a sycophant to whites and a traitor to his people. The new macho militants derided Baldwin's homosexuality, even referring to him as Martin Luther Queen. But the end point for Baldwin was the murder of King, in 1968; after that, he confessed, "something has altered in me, something has gone away."

In the era of the Black Panthers, he was politically obsolete. By the early seventies, when Henry Louis Gates, Jr., suggested an article about Baldwin for *Time*, he found the magazine no longer interested. Far worse for Baldwin, he was also seen as artistically exhausted. On this, Zaborowska disagrees. In championing the "Turkish decade," she attempts to defend some of Baldwin's later, nearly forgotten works. She is right to speak up for "No Name in the Street," a deeply troubled but erratically brilliant book-length essay, published in 1972 and described by Baldwin as being about "the life and death of what we call the civil rights movement." (And which, during these years, he preferred to call a "slave rebellion.") Unable to believe anymore that he or anyone else could "reach the conscience of a nation," he embraced the Panthers as folk heroes, while resignedly turning the other cheek to Cleaver, whom he mildly excused for confusing him with "all those faggots, punks, and sissies, the sight and sound of whom, in prison, must have made him vomit." As Baldwin knew, hatred unleashed is not easy to control, and here he demonstrates the dire results of giving up the fight.

"No Name in the Street" is a disorderly book, both chronologically and

"You don't know me well enough to not care how I look."

emotionally chaotic; Zaborowska sees its lack of structure as deliberately "experimental," and she may be right. At its core, Baldwin details his long and fruitless attempt to get a falsely accused friend out of prison; he looks back at the Southern experiences that he had reported on so coolly years before, and exposes the agony that he had felt. At the same time, he wants us to know how far he has come: there is ample mention of the Cadillac limousine and the cook-chauffeur and the private pool; he assures us that the sufferings of the world make even the Beverly Hills Hotel, for him, "another circle of Hell." And he is undoubtedly suffering. He does his best to denounce Western culture in the terms of the day, as a "mask for power," and insists that to be rid of Texaco and Coca-Cola one should be prepared to jettison Balzac and Shakespeare. Then, as though he had finally gone too far, he adds, "later, of course, one may welcome them back," a loss of nerve that he immediately feels he has to justify: "Whoever is part of whatever civilization helplessly loves some aspects of it and some of the people in it." Struggling to finish the book, Baldwin left Istanbul behind in 1971—the city was now as overfilled with distractions as Paris or New York—and bought a house in the South of France. The book's concluding dateline, a glaring mixture of restlessness and pride, reads "New York, San Francisco, Hollywood, London, Istanbul, St. Paul de Vence, 1967-1971."

It is difficult for even the most fervent advocate to defend "Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone," an oddly depthless novel about a famous black actor, which, on its publication, in 1968, appeared to finish Baldwin as a novelist in the minds of everyone but Baldwin, whose ambitions seemed only to grow. His next two novels, largely about family love, are mixed achievements: "If Beale Street Could Talk" (1974), the brief and affecting story of an unjustly imprisoned Harlem youth, is told from the surprising perspective of his pregnant teen-age girlfriend (who only occasionally sounds like James Baldwin); "Just Above My Head" (1979), a multigenerational melodrama, contains one unforgettable segment, nearly four hundred pages in, about a trio of young black men travelling through the South. There were still signs of the exceptional gift. But the intensity, the coruscating language, the tight coherence of that first novel—where had they gone? The answers to this often asked question have varied: he had stayed away too long, and become detached from his essential subject; he had been corrupted by fame, and the booze didn't help; or, maybe, he could only really write about himself. Baldwin's biographer and close friend David Leeming suggested to Baldwin, in the mid-sixties, that "the anarchic aspect" of his daily existence was interfering with his work. But the most widely credited accusation is that his political commitments had deprived him of the necessary concentration, and cost him his creative life.

The case is presented by another of Baldwin's biographers, James Campbell, who states that in 1963 Baldwin "exchanged art for politics, the patient scrutiny for the hasty judgment, *le mot juste* for *le mot fort*," and that as a result he "died a little death." But isn't it as likely that Baldwin's dedication to the movement, starting back in the late fifties, allowed him to accomplish as much as he did? That the hope it occasioned helped him to push back a lifetime's hatred and despair and, no less than the retreat to Paris or Istanbul, made it possible for him to write at all? It is important to note that the flaws of the later books are evident in "Another Country," and even in "Giovanni's Room," both completed before he had marched a step. As for the roads not taken, among black writers who had similar choices: Richard Wright did not return to the United States and continued writing novels, in France, until his death, in 1960, yet his later books have been dismissed as major disappointments; Ralph Ellison took no part in the civil-rights movement, yet did not publish another novel after "Invisible Man." Every talent has its terms, and, while Baldwin was in no ordinary sense a political writer, something in him required that he rise above himself. "How, indeed, would I be able to keep on working," he worried, "if I could never be released from the prison of my egocentricity?" As Baldwin noted about his childhood, it may be that the things that helped him and the things that hurt him cannot be divorced.

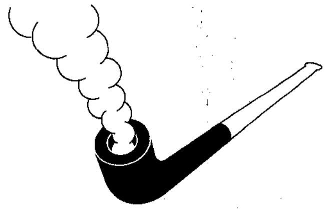
The final years were often bitter. Campbell recalls Baldwin, in 1984, reading aloud from an essay about Harlem that he'd written in the forties, crying out after every catalogued indignity, "Nothing has changed!" He was already in failing health, and tremendously overworked. He had begun to teach—the conviviality and uplift seem to have filled the place of politics—while keeping to his usual hectic schedule; he saw no need to cut back on alcohol or cigarettes. Baldwin was only sixty-three when he died, of cancer, in 1987, at his house in France. He was in the midst of several projects: a novel that would have been, in part, about Istanbul; a triple biography of "Medgar, Malcolm, and Martin"; and, of all things, introductions to paperback editions of two novels by Richard Wright. But Baldwin's final book was "The Price of the Ticket," a thick volume of his collected essays, summing up nearly forty years, in which his faith in human possibility burns like a candle in the historical dark. The concluding essay, about the myths of masculinity, offers a plea for the recognition that "each of us, helplessly and forever, contains the other—male in female, female in male, white in black and black in white."

It is shocking to realize that as early as 1951, and based on no evidence whatever, Baldwin saw that our "fantastic racial history" might ultimately be for the good. "Out of what has been our greatest shame," he wrote in an essay, "we may be able to create one day our greatest opportunity." He would have been eighty-four had he lived to see Barack Obama elected President. It is an event that he might have imagined more easily in his youth than in his age, but an event to which he surely contributed, through his essays and novels, his teaching and preaching, the outsized faith and energy that he spent so freely in so many ways. During his wanderings, Baldwin warned a friend who had urged him to settle down that "the place in which I'll fit will not exist until I make it." It was, of course, impossible to make such a place alone. But, by the grace of those who have kept on working, as he put it, "to make the kingdom new, to make it honorable and worthy of life," we have at last the beginnings of a country to which James Baldwin could come home. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

Blonde Roots, *by Bernardine Evaristo (Riverhead; $24.95).* This dizzying satire imagines a counterfactual history in which the roles of Africans and Europeans in the slave trade are reversed. Doris Scagglethorpe, the daughter of English farmers, is one day snatched up from her countryside cottage by traders and sold into slavery, soon arriving on the continent of Aphrika with a master and a new name: Omorenomwara. Evaristo (who is British and biracial) couples troubling stereotypes with scenes of slavery's hardships that are moving but somewhat generic, as if to poke fun not only at a genre or at received notions of race but, more subversively, at the contemporary reader's privileged desire to empathize. Unfortunately, this approach precludes any truly searching exploration of the psychological implications of such a traumatic historical event, and can result in a game of invert-the-reference—the celebration of Voodoomass, slaves being referred to as "wiggers"—making for uncomfortable but ultimately cheap laughs.

The Housekeeper and the Professor, *by Yoko Ogawa, translated from the Japanese by Stephen Snyder (Picador; $14).* This novel is narrated by a woman who works for a housekeeping agency in a small Japanese city. Temperate by nature, she is assigned a difficult client, a former mathematics professor who, because of an automobile accident, has only eighty minutes of short-term memory and is stuck in the year 1975. The narrator befriends the professor, who is especially taken with her young son (whom he nicknames Root, because "the flat top of his head reminded him of the square-root sign"), and gains an appreciation for the way advanced mathematics approximates poetry. Ogawa attracted notice last year with "The Diving Pool," a dark and edgy set of novellas. Here, despite some touching scenes, the relationship never builds to any great revelations.



The Bard, *by Robert Crawford (Princeton; $35).* Robert Burns died an exciseman (tracking down smugglers in the port of Dumfries), but he lived, loved, and versified as an outlaw. Incapable of keeping his "guid weely-willy p—le" in his pants, he produced an impressive number of bastards, as well as several legitimate children. He was a flash dresser, a smooth talker, and a political radical. Robert Crawford, following in the demystifying path of Catherine Carswell's 1930 biography (for which she received a bullet in the mail, along with a note imploring her to shoot herself), gives us a sympathetic portrait of a self-fashioning Burns who has to imagine himself as a bard—a poet not only in word but in act—in order to become one. Crawford's Burns, merrily mixing high and low culture, seems eerily contemporary. He shares with great hip-hop artists a genius for catchy, sexy, and memorable rhymes gloriously liberated from the hegemony of standard English.

The Fires of Vesuvius, *by Mary Beard (Harvard; $26.95).* The eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in 79 A.D. preserved a uniquely rich sample of Roman life. Buried among the ruins of Pompeii are frescoes, graffiti ("Atimetus got me pregnant"), campaign ads, and housewares; the victims themselves left hollows in the lava that, when cast in plaster, yield details as fine as the imprint of one man's eyebrows. In this lively survey, Beard, a classicist at Cambridge, tempers erudition with a skepticism toward interpretive overreach. "To be honest, this is all completely baffling," she remarks about a painting dense with iconography. Archeological reasoning is often ingeniously indirect—ragged drips suggest a bucket knocked from a platform by painters fleeing the volcano—and Beard's caution makes her an excellent guide for nonspecialists, as she explains both what we know and how we know it with equal clarity.

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THE THEATRE

HEDDA, GET YOUR GUN

A new take on Ibsen's masterpiece.

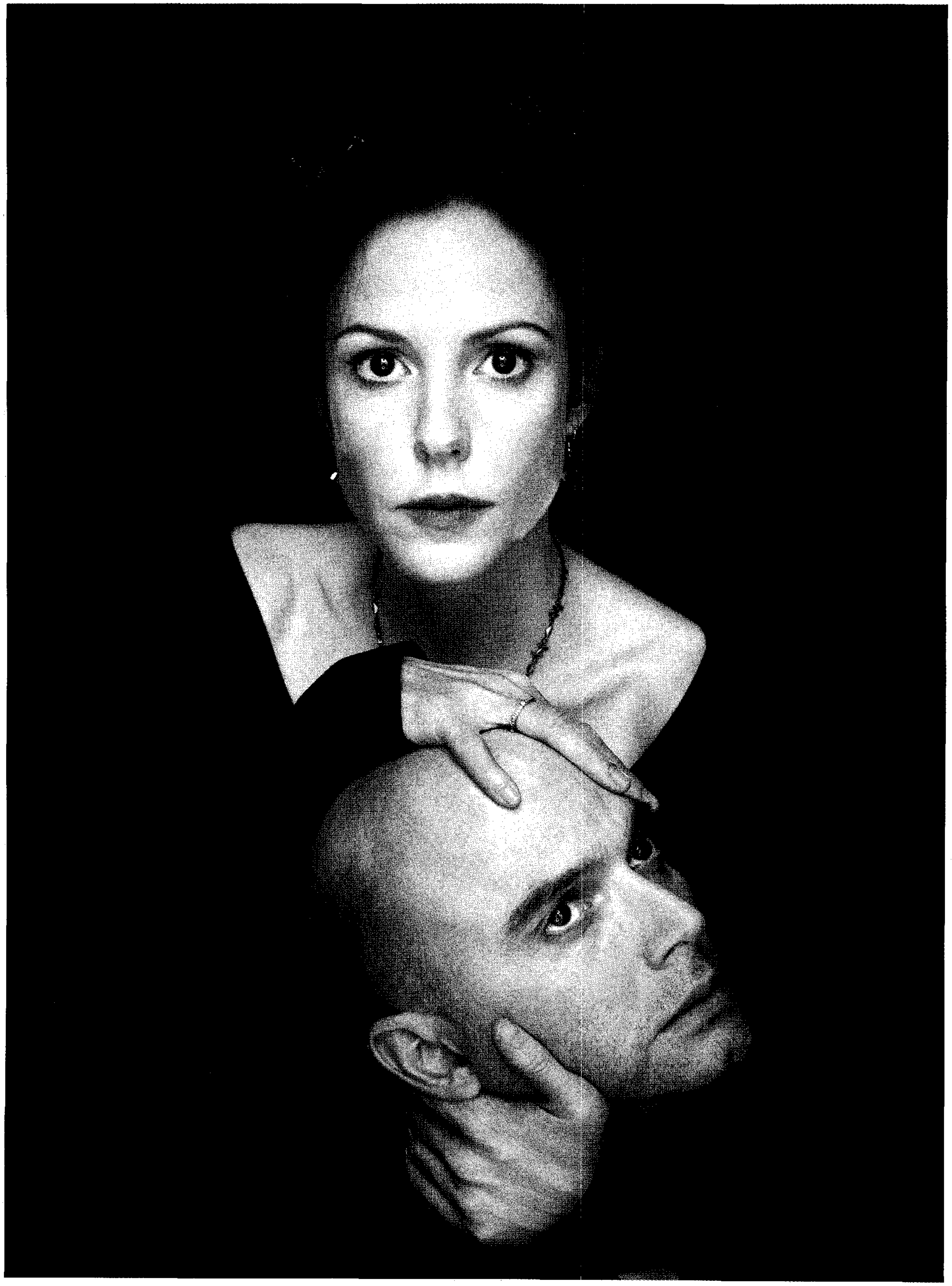
BY JOHN LAHR

"Hedda"—a name that means "strife"—was Henrik Ibsen's working title for his 1890 masterpiece (now in revival at the American Airlines, in a new adaptation by Christopher Shinn). To the first name, Ibsen added the surname of his character's military father, Gabler, a general whose portrait is meant to be visible on the set—an image of power that haunts his newlywed daughter's household and underscores Hedda's sense of her own powerlessness. "My intention in giving it this name was to indicate that Hedda as a personality is to be regarded rather as her father's daughter than as her husband's wife," Ibsen wrote. A beautiful aristocratic woman trapped by marriage in a bourgeois provincial Norwegian community, Hedda struggles to assert over her existence some of her father's command and control. (The only other physical vestige of him in the play is a pair of duelling pistols, with which Hedda is something of a quick draw.) "I want to have power over a human destiny," she says. "I have never had that. Not once in my life."

Strife is Hedda's fate; at first, it also seemed to be the play's—"Hedda Gabler" was the worst received of any of Ibsen's great works. "A horrid miscarriage of the imagination," "an ungrateful play," "one doubts whether reality can provide an example of Hedda Gabler," the press snarled. The playwright August Strindberg, who saw himself as the model for Ejlert Løvborg, a debauched but inspired writer, spat spiders at the play and its author, whom he called a "decrepit old troll." At a rehearsal of "Hedda Gabler" at the Moscow Art Theatre in 1899, Chekhov exclaimed, "Look here, Ibsen is not a playwright." In fact, this profound play, in which Hedda's contradictory desires both compel her and are concealed from her, foreshadows Freud's notion of the unconscious. (Freud is said to have learned Norwegian in order to read Ibsen's work.) "Our whole being is nothing but a fight against the dark forces within ourselves," Ibsen said. He, like Freud, was an archeologist of the modern psyche, one of those visionaries, as Freud observed, whose findings "troubled the sleep of the world."

In this production, directed by Ian Rickson, we first see Hedda (Mary-Louise Parker) in her own troubled sleep, sprawled on a sofa, her face to the back wall, exposing part of her alabaster ass—a sort of "Rokeby Venus" with venom, whose bared backside hints at the nihilism to come. Rickson's stage picture is startling, but it skews Ibsen's game—what Henry James called the "demure preservation of the appearance of the usual in which we see him juggle with difficulty and danger." The playwright's stage directions call for a bright, well-ordered drawing room. Here, instead of light, there is dark; instead of order, there is clutter; instead of Hedda's father's portrait, there is a glazed mirror, which reflects only Hedda's alienated self; instead of the external space, Rickson shows us her internal one. The choice, it seems to me, is bold but wrong. It tilts the stakes from psychological perplexity to didactic melodrama. For a person as unhappy and hate-filled as Hedda, the villa's luxury, beauty, and comfort—Ibsen's stage directions emphasize the carpeting—are an awful oppression, perpetual reminders of what she lacks and, therefore, what she must attack and spoil. This opening robs both the character and the audience of an insight into her toxic envy.

Even before the first words are spoken, Hedda prowls around the crepuscular gloom like an infantile termagant throwing a moody; she kicks over chairs, yanks dustcovers off furniture, sweeps bouquets of flowers onto the floor. Fine-boned and wasp-waisted, Parker plays Hedda as an icy, eye-rolling, passive-aggressive bitch. She's as petulant as a cat, and just as unbiddable. In a moment of impetuous weakness, Hedda recently married an academic, Jørgen Tesman



Mary-Louise Parker and Michael Cerveris share a doomed marriage in "Hedda Gabler." Photograph by Martin Schoeller.

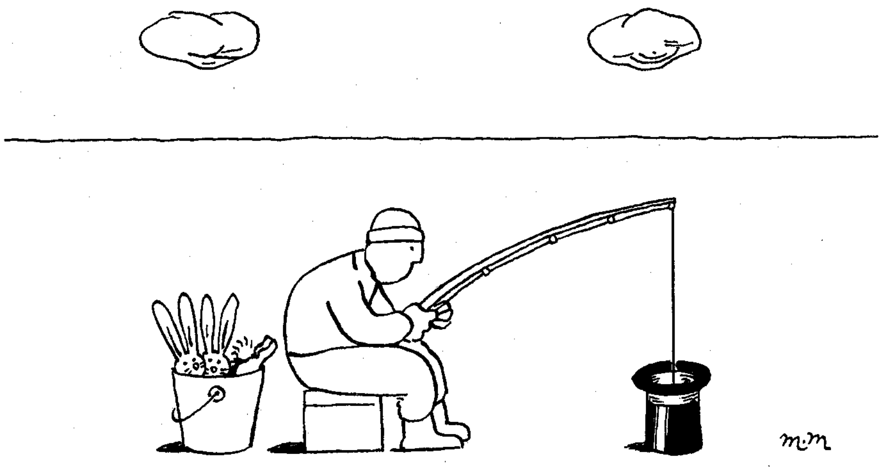
(Michael Cerveris), because "he pursued me so violently." Tesman is a boy-man, cosseted by his aunts as a child, and deluded about the wife whom he now lives to please. He is decent but absorbed in his writing—a tome on domestic crafts in Belgium and Holland in the Middle Ages—and emotionally clueless, completely unaware of the subversive cruelty that Hedda dishes out. (His credulity is part of what she despises about him.) The play opens on the day after their return from a six-month honeymoon. ("It was excruciating," Hedda confides.) Tesman's buoyancy about the future contrasts with Hedda's rueful vision of a lifetime of loveless boredom—a doom that seems all but guaranteed when Tesman learns that he'll have to compete with Hedda's former lover, Løvborg (Paul Sparks), once a drunken scapegrace and now a literary highflier, for the professorship and the salary that he thought were his. For the moment, at least, Hedda is faced with the bleak prospect of no horses, no servants, no society, and only Tesman for distraction. "This trip never ends," she says.

As someone who is always comparing herself with others, Hedda puts great store in appearances and in the show of propriety—she fears scandal. At the same time, she has a murderous, self-destructive heart that confounds her. "Something comes over me, all of a sudden," she says of her demon. "And then I can't stop myself. I don't know how to explain it." These overwhelming feelings intensify her detachment, and repressed hatred makes her perverse. To Hedda, love is a "sticky word." Stiffening at Tesman's touch, she seems to want no physical contact with him and bridles at his jokey claims to intimacy. "I have certain privileges," he says. "You have no privileges at all!" she responds. She also wants nothing to do with his loving extended family; she has no desire to share his past. ("What does that have to do with me?" she says, reacting to a pair of embroidered slippers made by his aunt and to the memories they recall. "Not my memories, are they?") She can't even bear to be grammatically linked to her husband. When Tesman says, in passing, "Nothing stands in our way," she shoots back, " 'Our way'? Leave me out of it." Even the dream house that Tesman purchased at great expense because Hedda claimed to like it turns out to be just another brick in the wall of bad faith she has built around herself. "I actually despised it," she confides to the unctuous, predatory Judge Brack (the superb Peter Stormare), who clearly wants to be the cuckoo in the Tesman nest.

At one point, Hedda fires her pistol in the direction of Judge Brack. "I stand and shoot at the big blue sky," she says. Many of Shinn's interpretations of Ibsen seem grapeshot, but this newly minted line is a bull's-eye. For Hedda, everything that's bright, joyful, life-giving, or creative is a target. In fact, the issue of creation lies at the heart of her barren landscape. At its most literal level, the plot turns on whether Hedda is pregnant or not. Throughout the play, Ibsen keeps the answer tantalizingly ambiguous. The other characters frequently raise the question; she just as frequently cuts those questions dead. Parker, it seems to me, plays it as if Hedda weren't pregnant and were obliquely dealing the baby card just to distract Tesman from the fact that she has burned Løvborg's new manuscript—his "child," as he calls it. Obviously, for Hedda, a baby would be the most profound trap of all. She can't conceive of a child; nor can she conceive of Løvborg's literary inspiration. "I only possess a talent for one thing," she says. "Feeling dead."

"What is healthy is the happiness one acquires through one's own will," Ibsen said. Løvborg is an embodiment of self-realization, who personifies the creativity Hedda longs for and therefore must destroy. A Dionysian figure, a spontaneous risk-taker with a hunger for life, who has wrestled with his demons and found love and artistic fulfillment with his "soulmate" and collaborator, Mrs. Elvsted (Ana Reeder), he uses his creative spirit to his advantage. His impressive new book, he tells the pedantic Tesman, who naturally has no idea what he's saying, is "about a history that lives inside of us all—in imagination—fantasy—dreams." As Løvborg, Sparks hasn't a whiff of wildness or danger about him, but his charged first encounter with Hedda is powerfully erotic. Mouth open, eyes shut, Hedda collapses on him like a nomad at an oasis; she seems to drink him in. Løvborg thrusts his hand under her skirt. "How could you throw yourself away like that, Hedda?" he says, calling her "a coward at heart." Hedda agrees. She is not brave; she is reckless, a signal of her resignation. Her life is a living death, so she has nothing to lose.

By luring Løvborg back to drink and then to suicide ("Use it—now. In beauty," she says, pressing her father's pistol into his hand), Hedda successfully exercises her control for the first time, and attacks both the happy couple and the creativity she cannot claim. "Oh, if you could only understand how poor I am—and you are allowed to be so rich," she tells Mrs. Elvsted, who later produces a jumble of Løvborg's notes for his destroyed book and begins to restore the manuscript, with Tesman's help. "Is there nothing you two can use me for here?" Hedda asks them. "Not a thing in the world," Tesman replies. Hedda's own suicide, when it comes, is not an act of contrition but an act of will, the only gesture of freedom left to her. It is intended as a perverse transcendence, a form of negative creation. In Parker's cold-shoulder interpretation, however, it plays more like sulking for keeps. ♦



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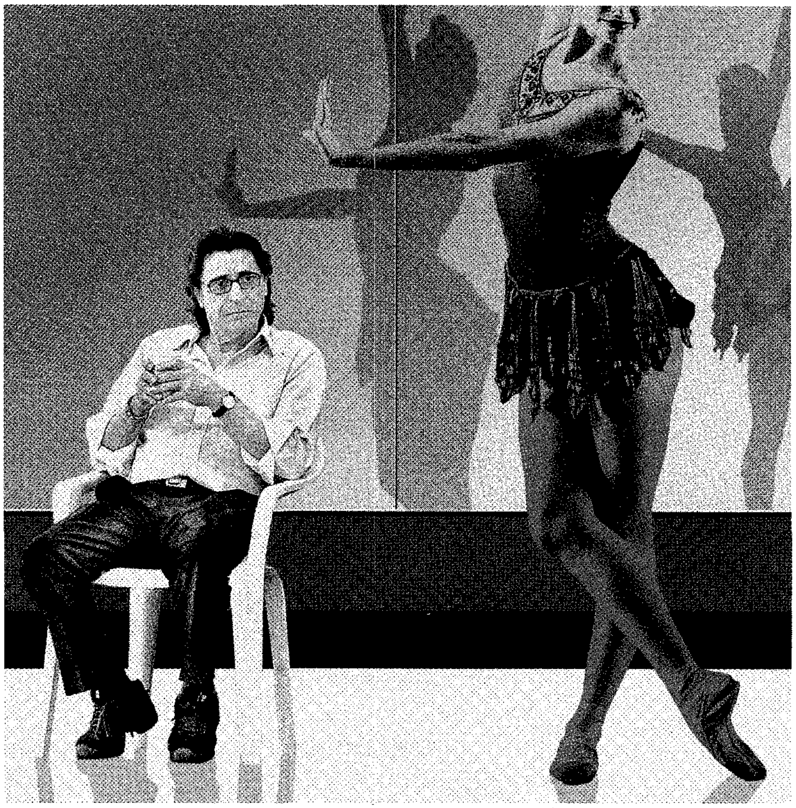
DANCING

LOCAL HERO

Edward Villella's Miami City Ballet comes to Manhattan.

BY JOAN ACOCELLA



SEAN MCCABE

Maybe it was good for Villella and his staff to be far away, and in a non-ballet town.

When the curtain came down on the opening number of Miami City Ballet's season at City Center late last month, the applause fairly rocked the hall. The dancers, taking their bows, were visibly surprised. I thought some of them were going to cry. This reception was not just for the company, or even for the thundering piece it had just performed, Balanchine's "Symphony in Three Movements." Clearly, it was also for M.C.B.'s director, Edward Villella, whom many New Yorkers regard with an old, possessive love. Villella was America's first great homegrown male ballet dancer. That was in the nineteen-sixties and early seventies, before the arrival of the Russians and the Cubans and the Spaniards, who, today, have made male show steps the most clappable thing in ballet. But Villella, at New York City Ballet, executed greater feats. The sautés développés en arrière (jumping backward while one leg is unfolding forward) that he produced in Balanchine's "Midsummer Night's Dream": no one had ever done such a thing before. (And few have done it correctly since.) Outsiders are always saying that ballet is undemocratic—it's foreign, it's snooty, it's passé. The people who do it are all tall and thin, not like us regular folk. And here was Villella, a short American guy, performing it as no one had ever seen it.

Nor was there anything snooty about his background. He was an Italian-American working-class kid from Queens. The only reason he got into a dance class was that his mother took his sister to the local ballet school, with Eddie tagging along, and the teacher said, How about the little boy, too? Villella's father, who drove a truck in New York's garment district, did not welcome this development. He wanted his son to get ahead in the world, and ballet did not seem to him a likely means to this end. He tolerated the lessons for a while, but once it became clear that Villella actually wanted to dance for a living—by then he had moved to the very serious School of American Ballet, New York City Ballet's affiliate—he insisted that the boy go to college. As a result, Villella had to quit ballet. After four years at SUNY Maritime College—he is no doubt the only ballet dancer in history with a degree in marine transportation—he went right back to ballet class, and he joined City Ballet a year later, in 1957, but, as a result of his interrupted training, he had crippling muscular problems throughout his career.

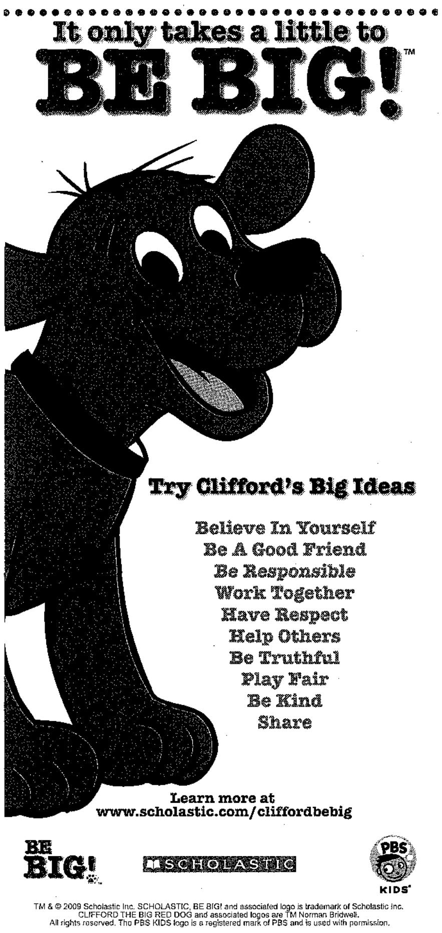
Still, he was a superlative dancer, and adored by the press, not only for his skill or even his artistry but also for his blue-collar origins and for his extreme, natural virility. The man seemed to be heterosexual, and, in mid-century American ballet, that was news. Balanchine, too, liked Villella's "street" manner, and used it. The section of his 1967 "Rubies" in which the male star, originally Villella, leads four other men in a chase around the stage is probably the butchest ballet number ever made. All this added up, in the public mind, to a symbol of national identity. In America, anyone could be President (or they can now), and an "ethnic" from Queens could become a ballet star.

Because of his physical problems, Villella stopped dancing early. Soon, he was invited to set up a ballet company in Miami. This was a tough assignment. Miami was not a ballet town, and donors were scarce. Still, he got a company going, in 1986, and within a few years—precisely at the time when Balanchine's ballets started looking dry and thin at his home company—we began hearing reports that Villella's troupe, however younger and poorer, was delivering Balanchine with the former dazzle. Eventually, the Miami dancers came north, but they couldn't afford a Manhattan season—as Villella pointed out in a recent interview with Roslyn Sulcas for the *Times*, it costs a million dollars a week to be produced in a decent-sized theatre in Manhattan—so the company went to Westchester, Long Island, Newark. Not many people got on the bus to go see those shows. Hence M.C.B.'s season last month was an enormous occasion. Not only was the company appearing, at last, in Manhattan; it was coming to City Center, where New York City Ballet was founded, and where Villella started out. It seemed like old times.

Most people don't expect Balanchine's work to look, today, exactly as it did under his supervision. But they want two things: first, that all the steps be there, executed carefully; and, second, that the performance suggest an idea behind the ballet. Other companies, including even the heavily criticized New York City Ballet, have given us the steps much of the time. What was missing was the spirit. For years, the younger dancers at N.Y.C.B. didn't seem to know what the Balanchine ballets were about, or that they were about anything at all, other than the fact that they were made by a famous dead man who founded the company and therefore they had to dance them.

Such cluelessness is what you do not see in Miami City Ballet. Maybe it was good for Villella and his staff to be away from New York, and in a non-ballet town. Maybe this forced them to ask themselves, Why do we like these ballets? Who cares? And perhaps it was by answering such questions afresh that they came up with performances such as that "Symphony in Three Movements," to Stravinsky, which was so hollered over on opening night. Stravinsky said that his 1945 symphony was probably colored by the Second World War. The ballet Balanchine set to it in 1972 certainly has that event in mind. The dancers move in massed battalions. They stick their arms out like airplane wings. The Miami dancers made the point—they performed with a kind of cheerful ferocity. They didn't bang us over the head, though. The lead ballerina, Jennifer Kronenberg, with pink ribbons braided into her hair, moved through the piece not like an agent of war but like a symbol of sheer energy, a winged victory, but of a higher realm.

That was the easy part. America still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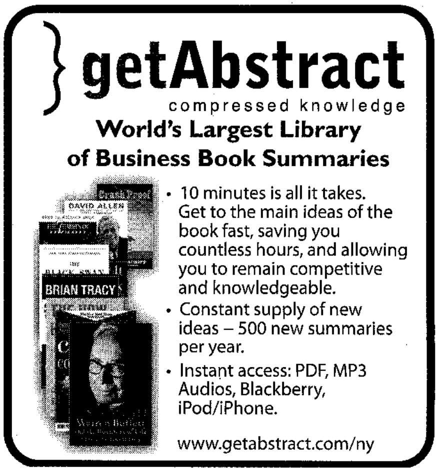
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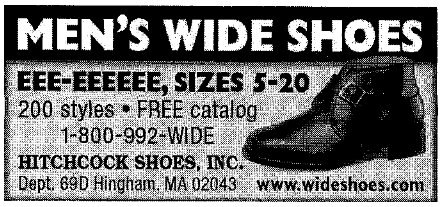
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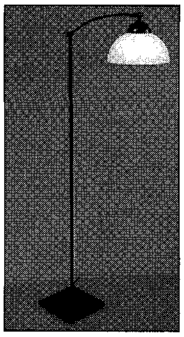

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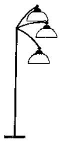

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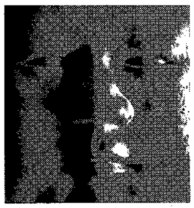

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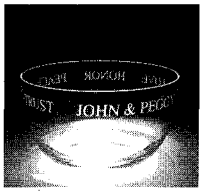

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knows about war. But we don't any longer know much about the sort of dark luxe that is the subject of Balanchine's 1951 "La Valse." This haunted-ballroom ballet is a sacred item, partly because it seemed to prophesy, and then commemorate, the fate of its original star, Tanaquil Le Clercq, whom Balanchine married the year after he made the piece. "La Valse," set to Ravel, is French and elegant, and its heroine dies. Le Clercq was French-born, and supremely elegant, and when she was twenty-seven her career was ended by polio. Perhaps in tribute to her, people say that "La Valse" has never been done right since she stopped performing it. I don't know. I didn't see her. But "La Valse," as I understand it, is about the amoral excitement of youth—the hunger for what glistens, even if it's not gold—and that's what the Miami production radiated. The women's hand gestures, so lovely and so affected; their fluffing of their pink-and-gray, smoke-and-fire gowns, by Barbara Karinska, a Russo-American who worked for years in Paris: I felt I was seeing these things for the first time.

Balanchine, his dancers say, never told them what his ballets were about, never gave them "motivations." He probably thought that he didn't need to. In his time, everyone knew what French stylishness was, not to speak of the Second World War. That is not the case with teen-agers in Miami in 2009, and Villella, as he said in his *Times* interview, fills them in. "Those three ladies who open 'La Valse': who are they? You need to know about Dior's 1947 'new look.' " As for "Square Dance" (1957), the opener of his second program, he must have told the cast that this American hoedown to the old Italian music of Vivaldi and Corelli was part of Balanchine's effort, in his company's insecure first decade, to convince Americans that they could be part of a classical tradition. Jeanette Delgado, leading the piece, encapsulated what I think Balanchine wanted: a marriage of barn-dance verve with European sophistication. At the end of a solo passage, she did a triple pirouette, then knocked off some hops on point and a gargouillade before calmly exiting. You wanted to run backstage and kiss her.

The season had obvious flaws, most of them probably due to underfunding. First, the music was taped. (Villella had planned to bring an orchestra. That was before the financial crisis.) Then, the men are not at all on the same level as the women. People claim that ballet companies outside New York get "second-best" bodies. That's not a nice thing to say, but it's true. Villella has some big guys, but most of them are not technicians. He has some technicians, but most of them are short and have a hard time partnering the women, raised five or six inches by their point shoes. In many respects, Villella just has fewer choices. In "Symphony in C," that beloved Balanchine showcase, the leader of the brisk first movement was Mary Carmen Catoya, the company's star of the past decade. From what I could tell from her performance, she doesn't want to be the star anymore—she wants to go home. A director with more resources could let her do so. The leader of the swooning second movement—Balanchine said that it was about the moon crossing the sky—was Haiyan Wu, from Beijing. Asian ballet schools tend to stress technical perfection over everything else. A few months ago, I saw Wu in another Balanchine piece, "Sonatine," and she was all poetry, but in "Symphony in C" she apparently reverted to training. She was like an ice sculpture—fixed face, fixed dynamics, every phrase the same. The director of a larger company could have switched the casting.

In most of the six ballets that the company presented, however, what you saw, down to the last corps dancer, was not just careful execution but real, breathing joy. Ballet training is a strange sort of two-step. You have to discipline the dancers, ask them to do the steps correctly. Then you have to release them from discipline, ask them to develop personalities. Villella has clearly done that. Kronenberg and Jeanette Delgado are big-time stars, but a number of the women in the company—Patricia Delgado (Jeanette's beautiful sister), Katia Carranza (a Mexican powerhouse), Amanda Weingarten (a comer, still in the corps)—dance as though they think they're stars. Someone told them they could be, and that makes all the difference. ♦

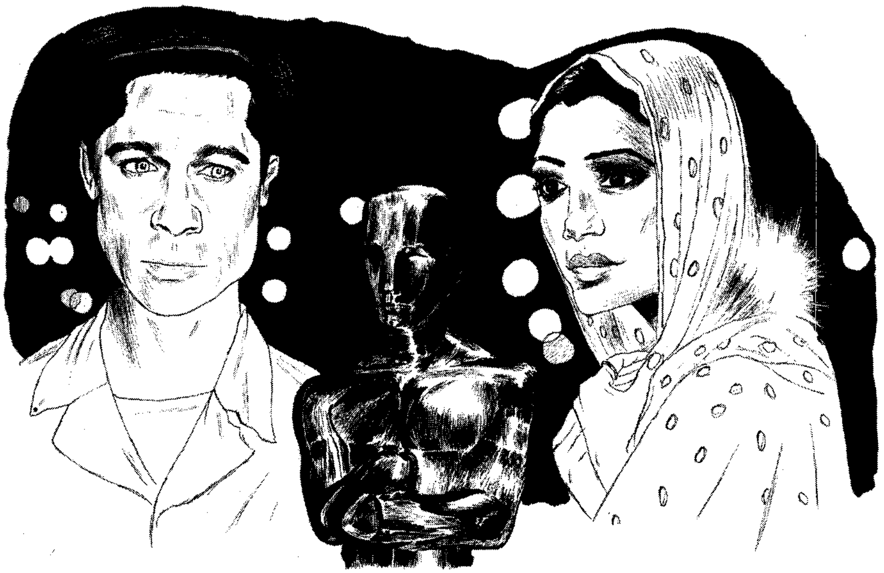
THE CURRENT CINEMA

CURIOUS CASES

This year's Oscar picks.

BY DAVID DENBY

Is it the seamlessly blended amber and caramel colors, the slowly gliding camera work? Or is it the sentiments that fall like flakes of wet snow into the dialogue? Many elements join to make the beautifully crafted "Curious Case of Benjamin Button," with a running time of two hours and forty-seven minutes, the best picture in years for a postprandial rest (popcorn division). As you may have noticed, 2008 was not a great year for movies. There was nothing comparable to the hair-raising "There Will Be Blood," or the ravishing "Diving Bell and the Butterfly," or the sinister "No Country for Old Men," from 2007. Even so, a nod for best picture could have gone to more deserving movies, such as Jonathan Demme's "Rachel Getting Married," which settles down into a revelatory examination of a family's anguish and joy; or "Happy-Go-Lucky," Mike Leigh's startling look at the power and the limits of goodness; or even the animated masterpiece "WALL-E," with its vision of the end of industrial civilization and its ironic salvation in an anodyne space station decorated in cruise-liner moderne. The total of thirteen nominations for "Benjamin Button" has to be some sort of scandal. "Citizen Kane" received nine nominations, "The Godfather: Part II" eleven, and this movie, so smooth and mellow that it seems to have been dipped in bourbon aging since the Civil War, is nowhere close to those two. In fact, of the five nominees for best picture—"Milk," "Frost/Nixon," "The Reader," "Slumdog Millionaire," and "Benjamin Button"—only "Milk," a bio-pic with a thrilling sense of history and lots of jokes and sex, has the aesthetic life and human vitality that warrant its nomination.



Brad Pitt, as Benjamin Button, and Freida Pinto, from "Slumdog Millionaire."

ANDY FRIEDMAN

"The Reader," based on Bernhard Schlink's novel, and "Frost/Nixon," based on Peter Morgan's play, have both, in their passage to movies, picked up an aura of preening importance that is not justified by what's onscreen. Schlink's intelligent book has been frozen in marmoreal stillness and hoisted onto a pedestal. His resonant reflections on postwar German guilt have been dropped, and what's left is a few good scenes set in nineteen-fifties Germany in which a tall,

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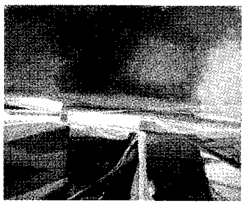

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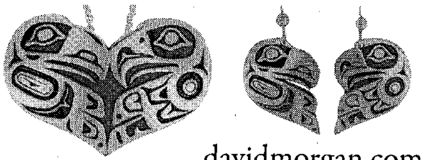

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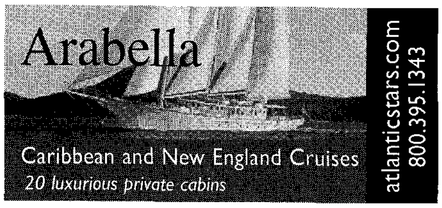

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fifteen-year-old boy (David Kross) has the luck to fall into a terrific sexual relationship with a woman (Kate Winslet) twenty years older—a stern, secretive, yet hungry partner whom the boy doesn't realize is a former concentration-camp guard. The sex scenes border on kitsch, but I can't say that I didn't enjoy them, and the cocky grin that breaks out on the face of young David Kross is irresistible. Unfortunately, as he grows up he metamorphoses into Ralph Fiennes, and Fiennes, who seems to have made a career out of anguished sensitivity, suffers so passively and silently when his old girlfriend is put on trial that you want to hard-elbow him back into life. Winslet, acting with her strong shoulders, suggests alternating currents of shame and pride, but the movie goes dead, and the notion that a woman who has committed atrocities is redeemed by the serious books that her former lover sends her in prison is, as the *Times*' A. O. Scott has pointed out, shaky and sentimental at best.

In the well-acted "Frost/Nixon," a nice journalistic coup—David Frost's pushing Richard Nixon into semi-confessional mode, in 1977—has been elevated to a great transformative moment in history, which, alas, it was not. These two films may have been controlled more by their directors and their writers than by their studios, but they're still the kind of middlebrow pictures that the Academy used to nominate in the bad old studio-dominated days—the contemporary equivalents of "Judgment at Nuremburg" and "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?" They are "important" pictures that "say" something about public issues. They're good for the industry's image.

The two movies likely to slug it out for the best-picture award, "Benjamin Button" and "Slumdog Millionaire," are something different: they are fairy tales for adults. "Benjamin Button" is based on an early story by F. Scott Fitzgerald, set in Baltimore, in which a child is born as a seventy-year-old man. In the story, Benjamin is about five feet eight inches tall at birth, as big as a baby giraffe, and he grows younger and smaller throughout his life until he dies a tiny infant. It's a deadpan science-fiction conceit that Fitzgerald transformed into social comedy: the upper-middle-class people Benjamin encounters are irritated by his oddity; he's not, they feel, playing his proper social role—he's willful, a nuisance. As adapted by the screenwriter, Eric Roth, and the director, David Fincher, the story is now about a baby born with the features and the internal organs of an old man but the mind of an infant. In a New Orleans old-age home that takes him in, he's simply accepted by the fading elderly as one of their own. When he's around seven, he has a sagging frame the size of a boy's and the face of an aged Brad Pitt (which turns out to bear a startling resemblance to the current Dick Cheney). He eventually leaves the home, enters a stunningly gentle world, and has assorted and generally meaningless adventures. Fitzgerald's curt little story has been literalized and solemnized and stretched into a quest for the essence of time—it's now a metaphysical conceit. As Benjamin makes his way, many people puzzle over the discrepancy between his age and his temperament. But who cares? The movie is given over to an infinitely patient and scrupulous working out of its own bizarre premise, and you come away from its sombre thoroughness with the impression that something profound has been said without having any idea what it could be. The central drama in the picture turns out to be Brad Pitt's makeup. By degrees, lines and wrinkles fade; soft flesh tightens into muscle; a stiff, wobbly walk eases into a saunter. What is this strange movie really about? A guess: many people in Hollywood endlessly have "work" done to put off aging, and here's a movie that begins with a wizened baby and ends with physical perfection, a progression that may encapsulate both the nightmares and the dreams of half the Academy.

Pitt's modesty when he comes into his own handsome flesh is becoming, yet his eyes are unforgivably blank. Where is Benjamin's exhilaration at shedding his infirmities? He tells us very little of what we want to know, which is how he feels about what has happened to him. Perhaps if you're born old with an infant's brain and get younger, you never know much of anything (including the ardencies and the anxieties of youth), but that kind of mental void doesn't yield much of a protagonist.

Benjamin leaves his loving girlfriend (Cate Blanchett) and travels all over the world and announces, "It's never too late, or in my case too early, to be whoever you want to be." Someone at Paramount Pictures must imagine that this sentiment is a gift to the world, because a full-page ad that the studio took out in the *Times*, on Inauguration Day, proclaims it as such. (The quote continues, "I hope you live a life you're proud of, and if not, I hope you have the courage to start all over again.") Courage is definitely a good thing to have; lots of money (which Benjamin inherits) helps, too. It seems that Roth has gone back to the fatuous simplicities of his screenplay for "Forrest Gump," with its dopey hero who conquers the world. Whatever else it might be, "Benjamin Button" is a celebration of ignorance; it could be a wan kiss goodbye to the Bush era.

The central plot mechanism of "Slumdog Millionaire"—Jamal (Dev Patel), a poor kid from Mumbai, overcomes his ragamuffin past and achieves fame, wealth, and selfhood by answering questions on a high-stakes game show—feels both cheesy and rigid. The movie is a Dickensian fable, but didn't David Copperfield have to work his way up the ladder? As Jamal thinks over the questions put to him on the show, moments from his early life float through his mind, and some wrenching event delivers the right answer to him. Apart from a nagging implausibility—how could every question link up with an old memory?—I object to the way that the director, Danny Boyle, orchestrates Jamal's life. Everything is seen in a flash—the boy's mother is beaten to death, a man is set on fire, tiny goddesses appear out of nowhere—and nothing is prepared, explained, or understood. As slum children, Jamal and his friends are enchantingly beautiful, but the supersaturated color makes not just the kids but every surface and texture shine glamorously, including the piles of garbage that Jamal and his brother live among. Boyle has created what looks like a jumpy, hyper-edited commercial for poverty—he uses the squalor and violence touristically, as an aspect of the fabulous.

Almost every movie, of course, is a fantasy, or a fable, or a fairy tale of one kind or another. In a great movie, though, narrative and technological magic combine to produce heightened intimations of the real, and that ecstatic merging of magic and reality is what imprints the movie on our emotional memory. Besides the children, what I will remember of "Slumdog Millionaire" is a disorderly exploitation of disorder, a kind of visual salad of glowing rotten fruit, constantly tossed. The envelope, please—I guess. ♦

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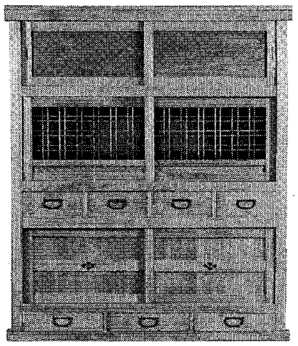

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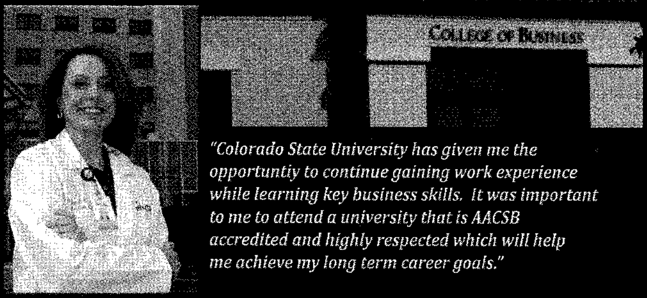

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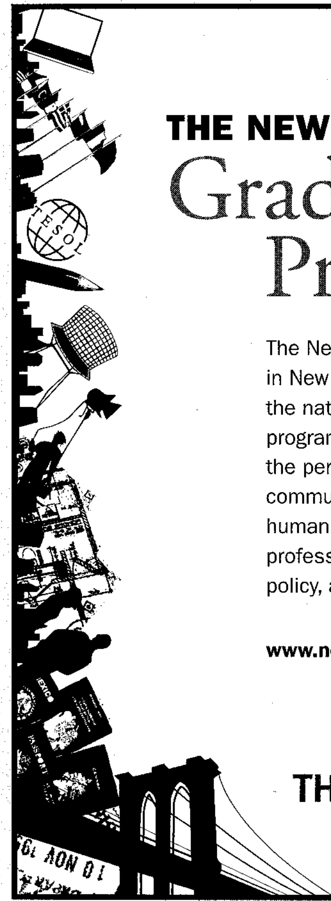

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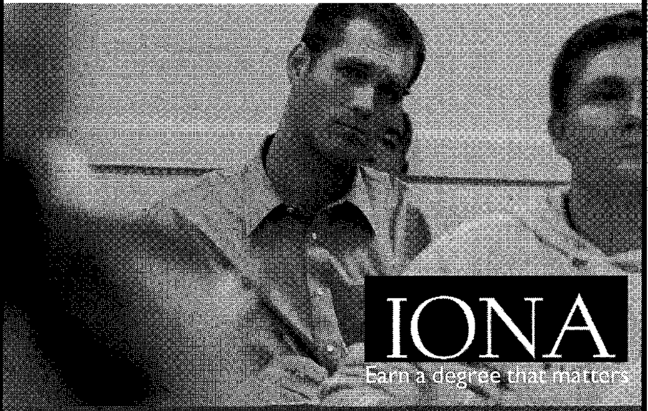

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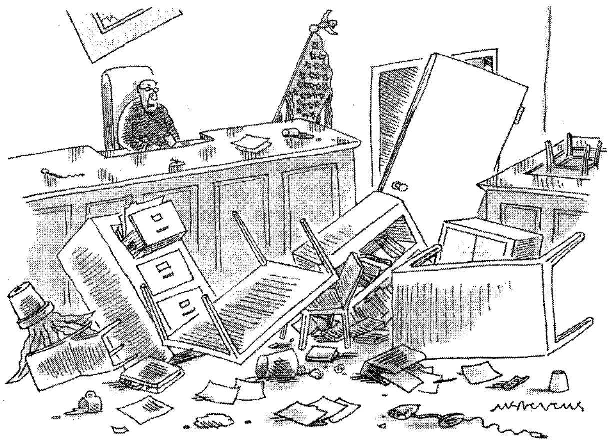
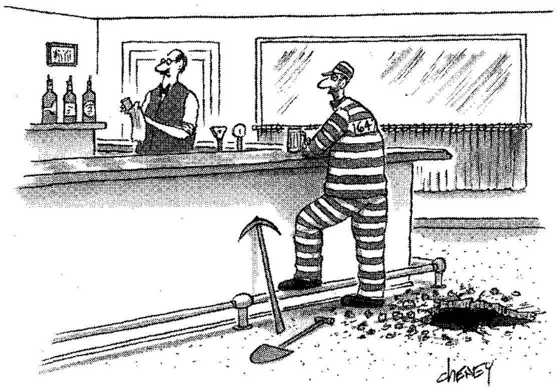
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Paul Noth, must be received by Sunday, February 15th. Finalists in the January 26th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the March 2nd issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"For a divorce case, that went smoothly."
Ann Seger, Chicago, Ill.



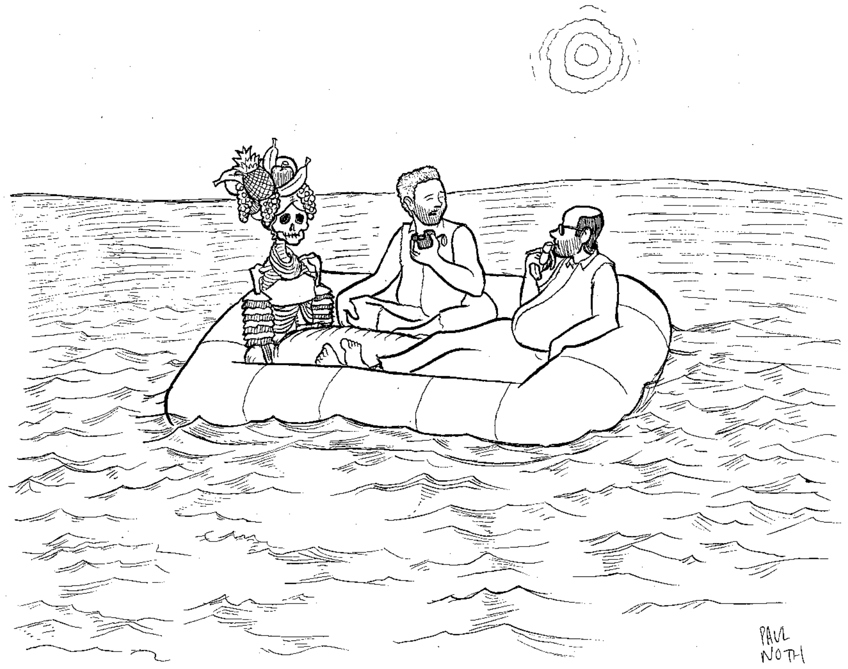
THE FINALISTS

"If anybody calls, I'm not here."
Iver Peterson, Lawrenceville, N.J.

"I'd kill for some peanuts."
Adam Cooper, Los Angeles, Calif.

"Most men drink to escape. I escape to drink."
Douglas Buck, Flint, Mich.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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[1] *Caring for Healthcare Workers: A Global Perspective*, 2007
[2] *FORTUNE*, March 2008
[3] *Ethisphere® Magazine*, June 2008

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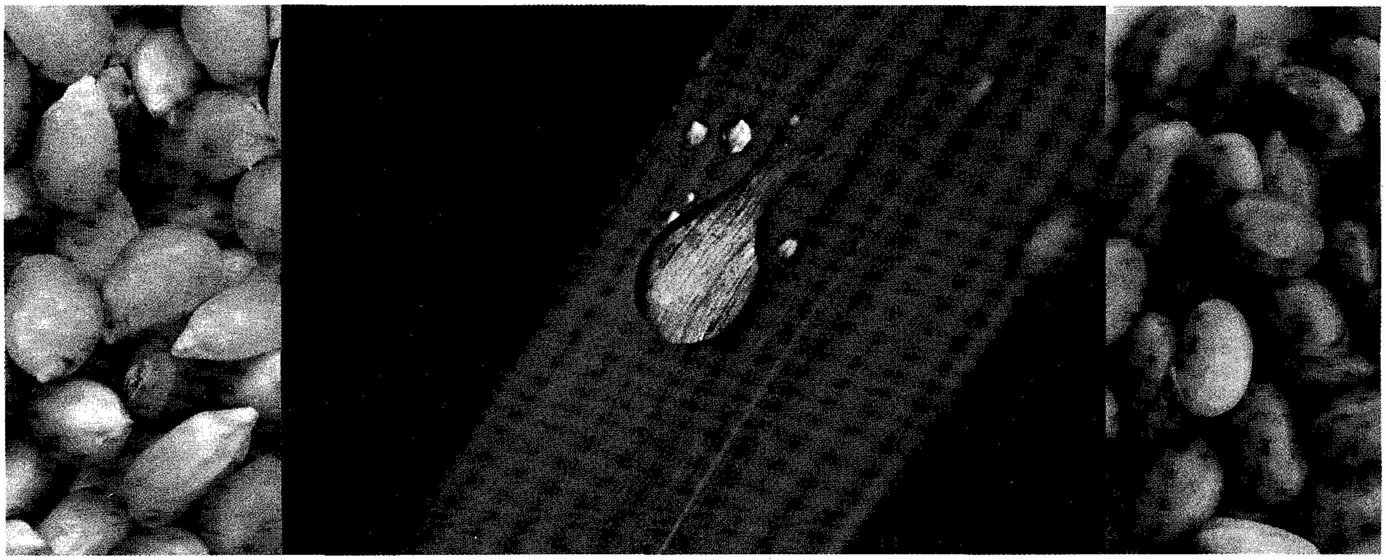
How can we squeeze more food from a RAINDROP?



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